

How do I start a neighbourhood watch in my area, or get involved in one?

It is important to note that:

- While the Police should get involved in the planning and advising of a Neighbourhood watch, the initiative to start one and the management of the watch, should come from the community themselves.
- The neighbourhood watch structures will be accountable to the Community Police Forum in the police station area

Web links with important information on neighbourhood watch, the Community Police Forum and Code of Conduct for Neighbourhood watches.

- What is the Community Police Forum:
<http://www.westerncape.gov.za/eng/directories/services/11459/9460>
- Provincial Constitution and Code of Conduct for Neighborhood Watch Structures:
http://www.westerncape.gov.za/text/2003/12/2003_draft_code_conduct_neighbourhood_watch.pdf

Unfortunately a most people think that:

- they don't need to get involved in projects to make their Neighbourhood / Business area a safer place
- somebody else will do it for them, or it will not happen to them
- it is the responsibility of the Police alone to protect their Life and Property
- If they ignore the problem of crime it will go away by itself
- alarms, burglar bars, and cameras alone would be sufficient to keep them safe

The following guidelines can be used to establish a good functioning neighbourhood watch in your area and hopefully will persuade you to get involved in some way or the other and do your bit. The only way you will really know what the state of crime in your area is or what threats there are, is by getting involved with other members of your community. The reason for this is the ban that was placed on the release of crime statistics by the South African Government. In terms of this ban the Police are prohibited from telling you how many housebreakings, thefts, robberies etc. was committed in your area.

People Working Together can make a Difference !

Crime and fear of crime threaten a community's well-being, people become afraid to use streets and parks, businesses gradually leave. Crime in turn feeds on the isolation it creates. Today's lifestyles -many homes where both parents work, more single-parent families, and greater job mobility -can contribute to community isolation and weaken community ties.

You and your neighbors can prevent or break this vicious cycle, and in the process, build your community into a safer, friendlier and more caring place to live.

Start with a Neighborhood Watch or block club to address immediate crime problems, focus on home security, and build neighborhood cohesion. Then move into other areas such as educating residents about child protection, drug abuse prevention, etc. Explore circumstances in the community that might contribute to crime and look for long range solutions.

The First Building Block - Neighbourhood Watch

Neighborhood Watch, Block Watch, Town Watch, Apartment Watch, Crime Watch-no matter what it's called, is one of the most effective and least costly answers to crime. Watch groups are a foundation of community crime prevention. They can be a stepping stone to community revitalisation.

Getting Started-Meetings, Block Leaders, and Maps

- Form a small planning committee of neighbors to discuss needs, the level of interest, possible challenges, and the Watch concept.
- Contact the local police, or local crime prevention organisation, to discuss the neighborhood watch and local crime problems. Invite a Police officer to attend your meeting.
- Publicise your meeting at least one week in advance with door-to-door fliers or emails and follow-up with phone calls the day before.
- Hold an initial meeting and begin to identify issues that need to be addressed. *Stress that a Watch group is an association of neighbors who look out for each other's families and property, alert the police to any suspicious activities or crime in progress, and work together to make their community a safer and better place to live.*

When the neighborhood decides to adopt the Watch idea it should:

- Ask for block leader volunteers who are responsible for relaying information to members on their block, keeping up-to-date information on residents, and making special efforts to involve the elderly, working parents, and young people.
- Block leaders also can serve as liaisons between the neighborhood and the police and communicate information about meetings and crime incidents to all residents.
- Establish a regular means of communicating with Watch members- e.g. newsletter, telephone tree, e-mail, fax, websites etc.
- Prepare a neighborhood map showing names, addresses, and phone numbers of participating households and distribute to members. Block captains keep this map up to date, contacting newcomers to the neighborhood and confirming occasionally with ongoing participants.
- With guidance from the Police, the Watch trains its members in home security techniques, observation skills, and crime reporting. Residents also learn about the types of crime that affect the area.
- Very important: Organisers and block leaders must emphasise that Watch groups are not vigilantes and do not assume the role of the police. They only ask neighbors to be alert, observant, and caring, and to report suspicious activity or crimes immediately to the police.
- The Watch concept is adaptable and can be organised around any geographic unit.

Tips for Success

- Hold regular meetings to help residents getting to know each other and to collectively decide upon program strategies and activities.
- Consider linking with an existing organization, such as a citizens' association, community development office, tenants' association, housing authority.
- Canvas door-to-door to recruit members.
- Involve everyone-young and old, single and married, renter and homeowner.
- Gain support from the police office. *This is critical to a Watch group's credibility.* The Police are the major sources of information of local crime patterns, home security, other crime prevention education, and crime reporting.
- Get the information out quickly. Share all kinds of news and very important *quash rumors*.
- Gather the facts about crime in your neighborhood. *Often residents' opinions are not supported by facts, and accurate information can reduce fear of crime.*

- Physical conditions like abandoned cars or overgrown vacant plots contribute to crime. Sponsor cleanups, encourage residents to beautify the area, and ask them to turn on outdoor lights at night

It's essential to celebrate the success of the effort and recognize volunteers' contributions through such events as awards, annual dinners, etc. To help meet community needs, Neighborhood Watches can sponsor meetings that address broader issues such as drug abuse, gangs, self-protection tactics, isolation of the elderly, crime in the schools, and rape prevention

Other Tools That Support Neighborhood Watch Programs

Citizen Patrols

An effective tool for some Watch programs to use is a citizen patrol. **It is up to the community in conjunction with the Police to decide whether a patrol is needed.** Citizen patrols are volunteers who walk or drive in an specific area on a regular basis to report incidents and problems to the police and provide a visible presence that deters criminal activity. **They have no policing powers, carry no weapons, are non confrontational, and always coordinate activities with law enforcement.** A citizen patrol can cover a neighborhood, an apartment lobby or complex, a business district, or a park; some use bicycles or cars to cover larger areas. They contact the police through two-way radios or cellular phones donated by a local business, etc. Cameras or video equipment may be used to record suspicious activity. Many patrols are based in a Neighborhood Watch program or work closely with one.

Make sure your citizen patrol:

- Undergoes training by Police and have their support;
- Works in teams;
- Wears identifying clothing -t-shirts, caps, vests, jackets-or reflective clothing or patches;
- Never carries weapons of any kind — e.g. guns, black jack, mace, baseball bat, or knives;
- Never challenges anyone;
- Always carries a pad and pencil, and a flashlight if it is dark;
- Is courteous and helpful to residents of the area being patrolled: and
- Keeps logs and files reports with the local Police.

How To Keep Your Neighborhood Watch Going and Growing

When crime drops or the neighborhood problem is alleviated, some Watch programs slowly lose momentum. To keep a Neighborhood Watch program vital, blend crime prevention into other community concerns.

Have your Watch group identify the neighborhood's strengths and problems and then brainstorm on what members can do to improve the quality of community life. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Encourage schools to teach crime and drug prevention in the classroom.
- Cooperate with parent associations, recreation departments, and schools to organise after-school programs for children and teens.
- Start a block parent program to help children cope with emergencies while walking to and from school or playing in the area. These programs can be a reliable source of help for children in emergency or frightening situations. Volunteers must meet specific standards, including a Police records check. Programs are established locally as a partnership among Police, schools, and community organisations.
- Work with small businesses to repair rundown storefronts, clean up littered streets, and create jobs for young people.
- Link up with victim services to train your members in assisting victims of crime.

- Recruit and train domestic workers and gardeners to become eyes on the ground.
- Ask people who seldom leave their houses to be "Window Watchers," looking out for children and any unusual activities in the neighborhood
- Encourage businesses to hold lunch-time crime and drug prevention seminars and special events for employees and their families.
- Get banks and other businesses to include crime prevention tips in their statements and bills.
- Work with local media to publicise events and thank supporters.
- Sponsor a seminar for the elderly and others on how to avoid becoming victims of con games and fraud
- Teach children how to use emergency numbers
- Establish a "buddy" system for the elderly and people with disabilities, in which someone checks with them daily by phone and summons help if needed.
- Link Neighborhood Watch to efforts promoted by other groups: drug prevention, child protection, neighborhood cleanup. Share resources and promote each other's activities. Invite guest speakers to Neighborhood Watch meetings.
- Promote your program and its successes in local media ranging from civic association newsletters, local radio or websites. (eg www.wellingtoninfo.co.za)
- Start a community crime prevention newsletter in your street, block, area or town. Block leaders or volunteers (including kids and teenagers) can distribute the newsletter, which also helps them keep in touch with residents.
- Work with businesses to develop a Business Watch program. Ask them to help pay for fliers and a newsletter, provide meeting places, and distribute crime prevention information.

Advice from Welgemoed Neighbourhood watch:

*Neighbourhood watch is one of the most effective ways for neighbourhoods to reduce crime in their surrounding areas. It will also assist in protecting property, reducing car break ins and house burglary. An effective Neighbourhood watch will help in regaining areas from criminals. Working in conjunction with our local police services and armed response organisations, we can be a formidable team against criminals and their illegal activities. It will require commitment from individuals, and a willingness to participate in keeping the streets clean. The collaboration and impetus will vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, but this can be assessed and formalised by a team from the area & police. Most people would agree that prevention is better than cure. A small price to pay, than to see loved ones suffering the often long term effects of being a victim of crime. Creating an awareness amongst residents as to the criminals actions and what to be on the lookout for, showing them how to monitor **untoward** behaviour, as well as who to report issues to, will immediately begin to produce results, while at the same time increase the levels of safety for all our community, from children through to the elderly. This will improve our lifestyle and reduce fear of crime in our daily lives. Help make your area secure - support your local neighborhood watch grow"*

Useful weblinks:

Other Neighborhood watches in the Western Cape:

<http://www.westerncape.gov.za/eng/directories/facilities/9363>

website where you can find help and Information on Neighborhood watches:

http://www.turnitaround.co.za/static_page/diy_neighbourhood

http://www.sacsheriff.com/crime_prevention/documents/neighborhood_watch_04.cfm