

How to Form a Neighborhood Watch Group

Introduction

Neighborhoods across the globe are coming together in an effort to keep their communities safe. Developing a neighborhood watch program is a good way to assist law enforcement while giving families a little extra piece of mind. Increasing a sense of unity and closeness between neighbors is one of the main benefits of these programs. Starting a watch group can be a simple process as long as you're organized and committed.

What is a Neighborhood Watch Group?

A watch group consists of concerned citizens joining forces to look over their neighborhoods and notice suspicious incidents. The group can be organized by any member of the community.

The Basics any neighbor can join.

Watch groups are not vigilantes; they are simply an extra set of eyes and ears for law enforcement.

You can form a watch group around any geographical unit, such as a block, apartment, industrial business area, park or public housing unit.

Members learn about home safety and crime prevention.

Watch groups build pride and increase a sense of community for neighbors.

The group always stays in close contact with law enforcement.

Step 1: Define Your Neighborhood

Since you are the person organizing everything, you will serve as the group coordinator. The responsibilities of the coordinator are pivotal because the person works directly with law enforcement to create and maintain the group.

The first thing you should do as group coordinator is contact your local police or sheriff department. You will be assigned a crime prevention officer who will become your source for all crime prevention, education and reporting.

Group Coordinator Duties Acts as the liaison between police and block captains.

Presides over meetings.

Maintains a master list of all watch members.

Stays organized in order to build a successful group.

Selecting Geographical Boundaries Once a crime prevention officer is assigned to help you, the next decision is determining the scope of your group.

Get a detailed map of your city.

Learn about the crime statistics for your location.

Consult with your crime prevention officer to select the coverage area.

Start small by choosing an area that covers about 20-30 homes.

Ask your crime prevention officer for a list of homeowners.

Create a block map that has phone numbers for each resident in your coverage area.

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Step 2: Get the Word Out

Once you know your target area, you can start signing up neighbors to be part of the watch. Your membership will grow as more people learn about the group.

Using your list of homeowners, create a chart of potential new members.

Use word-of-mouth to let your neighbors know about the group.

Distribute a flyer or letter introducing the new group and inviting neighbors to participate in an upcoming meeting.

Post flyers at local stores and shops.

Register your group with the national neighborhood watch database. This is a great way to stay current on the latest information and to publicize your group.

Step 3: Plan the First Meeting

Under the guidance of your crime prevention officer, hold the first meeting of your watch program.

Find a meeting location. Contact your local school, church or community organizations to ask if you can use their facilities for a meeting place. Other options include holding meetings in a volunteer's home.

Send out invitations. Two weeks prior to the first meeting, send out invitations to everyone on your master contact list. Post invitations in local coffee shops, grocery stores and churches.

Send out a reminder. Send out a last-minute reminder a couple days before the meeting.

First Meeting Agenda: The purpose of the first meeting is to give participants a general summary of the goals and strategies of the group. It serves as an introduction to the basic aspects of the program. Creating and distributing a written agenda with a timeline is a good way to start any meeting.

The first meeting should involve the following steps:

Hand out the meeting agenda.

Start by explaining why you started the group.

Have neighbors stand up and give their names.

Introduce the crime prevention officer.

Have law enforcement reveal the goals of the group.

Reveal crime statistics for your area.

Explain how decreasing crime is the purpose of the watch program.

Assign roles for key positions.

Make time for neighbors to ask questions.

Key Players

Every neighborhood watch group consists of key administrative roles and clearly defined responsibilities. In addition to your role as the coordinator, every group should have the following:

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Watch Members: Anyone who joins the group will become a watch member. These participants will attend meetings on a regular basis and follow crime prevention advice from law enforcement and block captains. Some members may also participate in planned neighborhood watch patrol outings in the area. A successful watch group depends partly on getting as many neighbors as possible to participate as members.

Law Enforcement: Serves as the expert for all crime prevention advice and information. Guides residents through the entire group building process.

Block Captain: Acts as the liaison between the coordinator and watch members. Part of their job is to maintain block map information and handle the daily functions of the group. The block captain is the primary link for distributing information to members.

Selecting a Block Captain Ask for volunteers who have enough time to dedicate to the group.

Choose a person with leadership abilities since they will spend much of their time giving instructions to members.

Pick several people to serve as alternates since the role of block captain should be rotated regularly.

Step 4: Mobilize the Group

A neighborhood watch group should encourage active participation from its watch members. As more and more neighbors begin to work together, the goals of the group will be easier to achieve.

Start watch patrols. Some groups decide to have members take turns driving around the area at selected times in order to look for unusual activity. Mobile watch patrols also give some reassurance to neighbors by making sure the watch group has a strong presence in the neighborhood.

Post street signs. Every city has different criteria, but typically in order to get free promotional materials (such as street signs, literature and decals), a watch group needs to have 50% or more of the neighborhood become members. Once you reach your city's requirements, you should start advertising the group to keep it growing.

Publicize your group. The more people who know about your group, the more likely it is to succeed. The entire neighborhood should be aware of the group.

Ask law enforcement for watch materials such as literature, forms and window decals.

Distribute window decals to all members of the watch team.

Send regular newsletters and flyers announcing upcoming meetings.

Consider getting additional street signs that are available for purchase online.

Step 5: Keep It Going

Your crime prevention officer will suggest group activities that can provide the foundation for a successful group. However, it's up to all members and role players to brainstorm different ways of increasing attendance and solving problems as they occur. Once your group is active, it's important to maintain the momentum and follow up. Take steps to make it effective and sustain your group:

Hold Regular Meetings Neighborhood watch group meetings are a great way for members to share information while also getting to know each other better. Having a schedule of regular meetings shows neighbors that you're serious about maintaining the group.

Steps for a successful meeting:

Have members sign-in.

Allow some time for neighbors to chat.

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Hand out a written agenda describing the timeline and topics for the meeting.
A short welcome from the group coordinator.

Distribute updated contact lists.

Presentation from crime prevention officer or guest speaker.

Have an open forum to address all questions.

Give a preview of the next meeting.

Invite Guest Speakers In the beginning of your group, law enforcement will provide most of the content during meetings. Eventually, you should invite a variety of guest speakers to attend your meetings and give presentations on home safety and self defense.

Update Your Records As residents move in and out of the neighborhood, it's important to make sure all the master group lists are updated. The group coordinator is responsible for maintaining this information.

Every watch group should have the following lists:

Using your coverage map, maintain a complete list of contact information for all neighbors.

Create a phone tree that contains cell phone numbers for each resident, along with residential land lines.

Get alternative phone numbers for each home, along with work and school phone numbers.

List vehicle information and license plates for each homeowner.

Involve Neighbors Remember that a neighborhood watch group is only as strong as the members, so encourage community participation.

Share the success stories of the group at meetings.

Send out invitations to new neighbors.

Always ask watch members for input on decisions that affect the group.

Educate Members

Once a group is formed, the main goal for law enforcement is to educate members about crime prevention, public safety and crime reporting. This is an ongoing process that will continue throughout the duration of the group.

Source: <http://www.mahalo.com/how-to-organize-a-neighborhood-watch-program>