



Swansea Police Department

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- ❖ **Integrity**
- ❖ **Teamwork**
- ❖ **Service**
- ❖ **Leadership**

TAKE A STAND!

Join Neighborhood Watch Now!

Neighborhood Watch is one of the oldest and most effective crime prevention programs in the country, bringing citizens together with law enforcement to deter crime and make communities safer.

Neighborhood Watch can trace its roots back to the days of colonial settlements, when night watchmen patrolled the streets. The modern version of Neighborhood Watch was developed in response to requests from sheriffs and police chiefs who were looking for a crime prevention program that would involve citizens and address an increasing number of burglaries.

Launched in 1972, Neighborhood Watch counts on citizens to organize themselves and work with law enforcement to keep a trained eye and ear on their communities, while demonstrating their presence at all times of day and night. Neighborhood Watch works because it reduces opportunities for crime to occur; it doesn't rely on altering or changing the criminal's behavior or motivation.

Tips

- Work with the Swansea Police Department. This relationship is critical to a Watch group's credibility and are the source of necessary information and training.
- Link up with your victims' services office to get your members trained in helping victims of crime.
- Hold regular meetings to help residents get to know each other and to decide upon program strategies and activities.
- Consider linking with an existing organization, such as a citizens' association, community development office, tenants' association, or housing authority. They may be able to provide an existing infrastructure you can use.
- Canvass door-to-door to recruit members.
- Ask people who seldom leave their homes to be "window watchers," looking out for children and reporting any unusual activities in the neighborhood.
- Translate crime and drug prevention materials into Spanish or other languages needed by non-English speakers in your community. If necessary, have a translator at meetings.
- Sponsor a crime and drug prevention fair at a church hall, temple, shopping mall, or community center.
- Gather the facts about crime in your neighborhood. Check police reports, conduct victimization surveys, and learn residents' perceptions about crimes. Often, residents' opinions are not supported by facts, and accurate information can reduce the fear of crime.
- Physical conditions like abandoned cars or overgrown vacant lots contribute to crime. Sponsor cleanups, encourage residents to beautify the area, and ask them to turn on outdoor lights at night.

- Work with small businesses to repair rundown storefronts, clean up littered streets, and create jobs for young people.
- Start a block parent program to help children cope with emergencies while walking to and from school or playing in the area.
- Emphasize that Watch groups are not vigilantes and should not assume the role of the police. Their duty is to ask neighbors to be alert, observant, and caring—and to report suspicious activity or crimes immediately to the police.

Strategy: Safer Design of Public Areas in Neighborhoods

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Drug problem addressed

Some communities are perfect hideaways for drug dealers and users. The lighting is poor, the streets permit speeding traffic, traffic patterns enable quick-getaways, signs are in disrepair, and there are no sidewalks for residents.

Key Components

Crime and drug activity can be reduced if a neighborhood or community is physically designed to provide protection for its residents. Physical changes or improvements can include erecting and maintaining better outdoor lighting, installing and enforcing traffic control signs and lights, closing or limiting access to streets to avoid through traffic, building fences, cleaning up bushes and shrubbery in parks and other public places, installing or repairing sidewalks, and removing abandoned vehicles.

Key Partnerships

Community residents can team up with municipal planners, architects, city agencies, law enforcement, traffic engineers, and utility companies to create a safer environmental design in their neighborhoods.

Possible Obstacles

Often, municipal governments are unwilling to work with neighborhoods to improve the physical layout and design of their area to reduce the presence of drug dealers and other criminals. The process frequently takes time because of the requirements of surveying, analysis, bidding for contracts, and allocating funds, all of which require patience from neighborhood residents. In addition to technical issues, there are also issues of eliminating residents fears, establishing trust between law enforcement and residents, and working to design a model that not only increases safety, but promotes neighborhood beautification.

Signs of Success

In the fall of 1992, residents in the Five Oaks community of Dayton, OH, joined forces with local police and city planners to institute a Neighborhood Stabilization program. Based on the premise of creating defensible space, 35 iron gates and 26 alley barricades were installed around the Five Oaks community. The gates and barricades were effective in closing off open space previously occupied and used as a main thoroughfare by drug dealers and prostitutes. According to a report from the Dayton Office of Management and Budget, the initiative resulted in a 50 percent decrease in violent crime and a 24 percent decrease in nonviolent crime.

Applying the Strategy

In the east-side peninsula of Bridgeport, CT, an area referred to locally as "Beirut" where 10 percent of the state's homicides occurred in one year, local police authorities and city planning officials implemented a street modification program called the Phoenix Project. Street barriers were installed in heavy drug traffic areas to create "loop" streets coupled with traffic control devices (signs, signals, markings, and gates), making street entrances one-way, turn-offs onto side streets difficult, and traffic flow easier to manage and monitor. The project involved a ten-component community intervention plan including community mobilization, increased tactical enforcement, and a multilaw enforcement sting operation targeted at removing dangerous gang and drug leaders from the streets. The overall initiative resulted in an approximate 75 percent decline in crime and the lowest crime rate in the area since 1972.

Strategy: Starting Neighborhood Watch Groups

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Organized groups of neighborhood residents who watch out for criminal and suspicious behavior and report it to local law enforcement help prevent crime and promote cooperation among residents and police.

Community Problem Addressed

Every day, neighborhoods across the United States confront any number of property and violent crimes and threats of crime. This strategy attempts to provide local law enforcement with additional eyes and ears to watch out for all types of criminal activity and promote neighborhood security. Community crime watches can address all types of crime, but their primary focus is typically residential burglary and other crimes around the home, such as larceny and vandalism. Their presence can also help deter criminals who would attempt to conduct drug- or gang-related activities in the neighborhood.

Key Components

The first step is to identify key leaders or persons most concerned about crime in the neighborhood and organize a meeting of these individuals to discuss safety. The police can be invited to a neighborhood meeting to discuss community safety, and volunteers can be solicited to serve as block watch leaders. The neighborhood may be divided by

blocks and block leaders assigned to serve as points of contact. A communication network can be organized to pass along information about crime and security to residents. The police may provide training on recognizing and reporting suspicious activity and on home and neighborhood security. The watch may expand to foot or car patrols. The watch can provide a variety of safety and security information to residents.

Key Partnerships

Local law enforcement officials and residents form the crucial partnership in this strategy. Training from the police and help with recruitment and communication ensure the watch program's success and provide the basis for a sustained and broad-based community effort to promote public safety. Local media aid watch groups by publicizing recruitment drives and successes in crime prevention through citizen involvement. Involving seniors and youth will also make the program more comprehensive.

Potential Obstacles

Apathy, civic disengagement, and fear are among the most common obstacles to forming a Neighborhood Watch. Education, usually via law enforcement, can overcome such obstacles. The potential for displacing crime to other neighborhoods is a concern for law enforcement; they seek to involve as many neighborhoods as possible to offset the potential for displacement. Also, volunteer momentum can wane if the program is narrowly focused and does not allow for a variety of roles that use residents' talents and respect their varying degrees of comfort with visible involvement in public safety programs.

Examples of Success and Results

In 1994 in Laurel Lake, New Jersey, community residents working with law enforcement founded the Laurel Lake Community Crime Watch in response to an increase in property crime and drug activity in the rural community [population 2,800]. Police calculated that 90 percent of the crimes in the area during that year were property crimes committed by those involved in buying and selling drugs.

The patrol serves as the eyes and ears for the New Jersey State Police and aims to prevent acts of property crime. As a consequence of the community watch group's efforts, there was no more graffiti nor any other acts of vandalism. In addition, when the town began enforcing local ordinances like the late-night juvenile curfew, residents noticed fewer youth on the streets and in trouble.

Since 1981, the National Association of Town Watch has promoted the Neighborhood Watch concept, encouraged community groups throughout the United States to pool resources in crime prevention efforts, shared crime prevention information with thousands of local organizations, and coordinated National Night Out, an annual August event where communities demonstrate their desire for peaceful neighborhoods through parties, cookouts, and crime prevention fairs.

A Checklist For Starting a Neighborhood Watch Program

You Will Need:

- ✓ A person or group of people committed to starting a Neighborhood Watch.
- ✓ A planning committee to initiate the program.
- ✓ A list of what issues initially need to be addressed in your community.
- ✓ A means of communicating with the residents, e-mail, social media, fliers, telephone trees.
- ✓ Publicity for the initial Neighborhood Watch meeting.
- ✓ A meeting agenda to keep things moving and on track.
- ✓ A place to meet - resident's house or apartment, community center, school, library.
- ✓ A crime prevention officer to discuss the crime issues in the neighborhood and to help train members.
- ✓ A map of the community with spaces for names, addresses, and phone numbers of all households.
- ✓ A sign-up sheet for those interested in becoming block or building captains.
- ✓ Brochures or other materials on topics of interest to the residents.
- ✓ Neighborhood Watch signs to be posted around the community. The Swansea Police Department will provide signs once the watch is up and running.
- ✓ Facts about crime in your neighborhood. (These can be found in police reports, newspapers, and residents' perception about crime. Often residents' opinions are not supported by facts, and accurate information can reduce fear of crime.)

To Add Excitement:

- ✓ Mix business with pleasure -allow attendees time to socialize.
- ✓ Seek out neighborhood go-getters -civic leaders and elected officials -to be your advocates and mentors.
- ✓ Work with such existing organizations as citizens' association, tenants' association, or housing authorities.
- ✓ Provide speakers on topics of community interest.
- ✓ Link crime prevention into activities promoted by other groups: child protection, anti-vandalism projects, start a neighborhood newsletter.

To Build Partnerships:

- ✓ The police department's endorsement is critical to a Watch group's credibility. This agency is the major source of information on local crime patterns, crime prevention education, and crime reporting.
- ✓ Local businesses and organizations can help provide fliers and a newsletter, offer meeting places, and distribute crime prevention information.
- ✓ Ask an electronics store to donate cellular phones.
- ✓ Libraries can provide research materials, videos, computers, and meeting space.
- ✓ Media can aid Neighborhood Watches by publicizing recruitment drives.
- ✓ Look to volunteer centers, parent groups, and labor unions for advice on recruiting volunteers.
- ✓ Teenagers are valuable resources. They can be an integral part of a citizens' patrol including biking in the neighborhood.
- ✓ Places of worship can provide meeting space and a good source of volunteers.