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## How Do Neighborhood Watch Groups Protect You?

In one form or another, Neighborhood Watch has existed in America since the 17th century when night watchmen patrolled the streets of colonial settlements. Watchmen were, for the most part, ordinary citizens, and it was considered a man's civic duty to serve in this capacity.

The modern-day concept of Neighborhood Watch originated in the late 1960s, at a time when the crime rate had begun to escalate, and citizens and law enforcement personnel alike began to feel genuine alarm. The Los Angeles Police Department enlisted the assistance of citizens in reporting suspicious activities in an attempt to stem the rising tide of property crimes. This was the birth of today's Neighborhood Watches.

The National Sheriffs' Association took this concept a step further in 1972 when it organized the National Neighborhood Watch Program (NNWP) with funding from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Over the next seven years, NNWP distributed millions of pieces of crime prevention literature and provided technical assistance to law enforcement agencies and citizen organizations to implement local programs.

The purpose was to encourage citizens to join in community crime prevention efforts -- resulting in the creation of thousands of local residential Watch Groups nationwide. Citizens worked FIRST, to make their own homes less inviting targets for burglars, and SECOND, in conjunction with their neighbors and law enforcement to reduce the likelihood of crime in their neighborhoods.



**Neighborhood Watch Groups are as vitally important today as they were in the 1970s. There are several reasons why this is so:**

- **Neighborhood Watch is a basic crime prevention program that stresses education and common sense.** It teaches citizens how to help themselves through home security techniques. It also teaches citizens how to identify and report suspicious activity. By encouraging citizens to be aware of their surroundings and to look out for one another, they are decreasing the likelihood of becoming crime victims.

- **Neighborhood Watch gives citizens an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of their community.** It can be as simple as collecting the neighbor's mail while they are on vacation, to more extensive efforts such as organizing citizen patrols. Both activities emphasize the cooperative aspect of Neighborhood Watch and how working together can make a neighborhood safer, as well as improve the quality of life.

- **Neighborhood Watch has helped to restore America's "Front Porch."** Americans don't know their neighbors as well as they once did. As our cities became more crowded, people sought more privacy and moved from the front porch to the back yard. *This front porch image is also played out the first Tuesday of every August with the National Night Out Promotion. On this night every year, front porch vigils are held, as well as other events like block parties, parades and cookouts to celebrate the fact that neighborhoods are organized and fighting back against crime.*

- **Neighborhood Watch emphasizes cooperation between community members and law enforcement.** Today's law enforcement agencies are working to form cooperative relationships with the community which is built on trust, problem-solving and the exchange of information. Through the years, Neighborhood Watch has grown from an "extra eyes and ears" approach to crime prevention, to a more proactive, community-oriented endeavor. For instance, Watch Groups today have evolved to include clean-ups and other activities which impact the quality of life for the residents.

