



Melbourne Police Department Crime Prevention

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM

Neighborhood Watch programs are the most effective means available for keeping crime out of neighborhoods. It relies on the best crime fighting tool ever invented, i.e., a good neighbor. Fortunately, good neighbors are found everywhere. They live in houses, apartment buildings, urban, suburban and rural areas.

The Melbourne Police Department Neighborhood Watch Program unites the Police Department with local organizations and individual residents in a community-wide effort to reduce residential crime. Neighbors working together with the Melbourne Police Department are a formidable crime fighting team. Be a good neighbor and make your community safer by starting a Neighborhood Watch Program.

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What is neighborhood watch?

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program enlisting the active participation of residents in cooperation with the Melbourne Police Department to reduce the incidence and fear of crime in their communities. It involves neighbors getting to know each other to develop a program of mutual assistance. It involves neighbors being educated in crime reporting and suspect identification techniques. Finally, it involves neighbors using crime prevention strategies as tools to reduce crime in their communities.

Why neighborhood watch?

The community has the primary responsibility for fighting crime. The most effective approach to fighting crime is a proactive one, i.e., stopping it before it occurs. This can happen when neighbors cooperate with each other to assist the Melbourne Police Department. Neighborhood Watch members place stickers in their windows and post Neighborhood Watch signs on streets, warning criminals they are in an active Neighborhood Watch community, and that "neighbors are watching out for each other."

Remember, you and your neighbors are the ones who really know what is going on in your community and there can't be a Melbourne Police Department officer on every corner. Resident involvement is essential to combat crime.

How do I start a Neighborhood Watch Program?

The Melbourne Police Department will assist in starting a program in your neighborhood. A Melbourne Police Department representative will be available for your first meeting to assist with the initial organization of the Neighborhood Watch Program and discuss crime concerns specific to your neighborhood or community.

Talk to your neighbors. Are they interested? Do they understand the value of a Neighborhood Watch Program? Are they aware of, or concerned about specific crime problems in your area? If they are, be sure to mention the following:

- Neighborhood Watch is a partnership between neighbors to assist the Melbourne Police Department in the reduction and fear of crime;
- Neighborhood Watch does not require frequent meetings;
- Neighborhood Watch does not ask anyone to take personal risks to prevent crime; and
- Melbourne Police Department personnel can attend your meetings to answer questions about crime and provide information about police procedures.

Arrange a date, time and place for the first meeting

Set the meeting date far enough in advance to give everyone adequate notice. Make sure the time is convenient for your neighbors as well as the Melbourne Police Department representative that will be attending. Distribute a flyer announcing the meeting and remind everyone a few days before to assure his or her attendance. If you are anticipating a small group, have the meeting at one of the houses in the neighborhood. The location should make everyone feel comfortable. Everyone may not attend, and that's okay. The program can still be successful with a majority of the neighborhood present.

- Hold the first meeting;
- Distribute nametags;
- Make opening remarks; and
- Provide simple refreshments to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Ask the assigned Melbourne Police Department representative to cover the following topics:

- Melbourne Police Department crime prevention programs;
- The main purpose of the Neighborhood Watch Program;
- Specific crime problems in the area;
- Effective crime prevention techniques;
- How residents can become the Melbourne Police Department's "eyes and ears" and assist them with criminal investigations; and
- How to report a crime and what to look for when providing a description.

Select a Neighborhood Watch Chairperson/Coordinator

The role of the Chairperson/coordinator is to:

- Oversee and arrange Neighborhood Watch meetings;
- Be a spokesperson for the group;
- Serve as a liaison between the Melbourne Police Department and the Neighborhood Watch group;
- Recruit neighbors to share the responsibility of hosting meetings;
- Maintain a list of all members; and
- Designate work assignments such as enrolling new members, vacation home watch, block parents, neighborhood patrol, fund-raising, secretarial duties, developing and maintaining block maps and crime prevention material distribution.

Remind members to call the Melbourne Police Department with concerns. The Neighborhood Watch Chairperson's role is to assist the Neighborhood Watch.

Develop and Distribute Maps

A map will help members give Melbourne Police Department precise information when reporting suspicious activity in your neighborhood. Your map should:

- Identify the Block Captain/Coordinator;
- Clearly identify streets, cross streets and compass points;
- Provide the name, address, and telephone numbers of each home and identify the ones with burglar alarms;
- Identify seniors and/or neighbors with health or mobility problems who may need special attention;
- List the make, model and license plate numbers of vehicles at each home. Help neighbors by letting them know which vehicles belong there during daytime hours;
- Include non-emergency telephone numbers for police, fire and ambulance;
- For crimes in progress or life threatening situations, call 9-1-1 immediately; and
- Update and reissue maps when any information changes.

Gather and Share Information

Knowing more about your neighbors, their vehicles and their daily routines will help you recognize unusual or suspicious activities. Consider exchanging the following types of basic information with your neighbors:

- Home and work telephone numbers;
- Names, ages and number of family members or residents;
- Work hours;
- School or day-care hours of children;
- Who owns a dog;
- Planned vacations or visitors; and
- Scheduled deliveries or repairs.



Maintaining a Neighborhood Watch Program

After your Neighborhood Watch is established, be sure everyone understands and observes the following guidelines:

- Be alert to unusual or suspicious behavior in your neighborhood. Call the Melbourne Police Department if necessary. Write down descriptions of suspicious person(s) and license numbers;
- Tell a trusted neighbor if your house will be unoccupied for an extended period. Tell him or her how to reach you in an emergency;
- Look after your neighbor's homes when they are away and ask them to look after yours. This includes picking up mail, newspapers and storing trashcans or recycling bins. Don't send a message that says, "No One Is Home;"
- Attend Neighborhood Watch meetings often. Your Melbourne Police Department crime prevention officer will teach you about local crime trends and what you can do about them;
- Above all, stay involved. It is the most effective way to reduce or prevent crime and make your neighborhood safe; and
- Remember your job is to report crime. The responsibility for apprehending criminals belongs to the police.

Reporting Crime

Eyewitness information is the key to solving many crimes. The following tips will assist you when reporting crime to the Melbourne Police Department. Call immediately. A five-minute delay can reduce the chance of catching criminals.

Tell the Melbourne Police Department as much as you can. No fact is too trivial. In many cases, what victims and witnesses tell the police about the criminal that result in an arrest. You may be asked the following when reporting a crime:

- Who, What, When, and Where?
- How many suspects were there?
- Can you describe the suspect(s)?
- Can you describe their vehicle(s)?
- What was/were the license plate number(s)?
- What did they do?
- What did they say?
- What did they take?
- Which way did they go?

Due to limited resources and personnel or a heavy emergency call load, the Melbourne Police Department may not be able to respond immediately. They have to prioritize their responses based on apparent danger to human life. Don't be discouraged. They will get to you as soon as possible. Do not attempt to stop or detain the suspect(s) yourself.

What is Suspicious?

Anything that seems even slightly "out of place" or is occurring at an unusual time of day or night could be criminal activity. The following are some obvious things to watch for:

- A stranger entering your neighbor's house when it is unoccupied;
- A scream heard anywhere might mean robbery or assault;
- Offers of merchandise at ridiculously low prices may mean stolen property;
- Anyone removing accessories, license plates, or gas from a vehicle should be reported;
- Anyone peering into parked vehicles may be looking for a vehicle to steal or for valuables left in the vehicle;
- Persons entering or leaving a place of business after hours;
- A sound of breaking glass or loud explosive noises could mean an accident, burglary or vandalism;
- Persons loitering around schools, parks and secluded areas could be sex offenders;
- Persons loitering in the neighborhood who do not live there; and
- Anyone forcing entry to, or tampering with a residence, business, or vehicle should be reported.

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Things to Watch Out For That Are Not So Obvious:

- **Strangers and solicitors.**

Verify the employment of all solicitors, meter readers and repair personnel prior to allowing them entry into your home. This can be done by obtaining the employer's number from the telephone book or by contacting directory assistance. Never take a telephone number offered by a suspicious person. Be suspicious of alleged delivery personnel with a wrong address or asking if someone lives there.

- **Someone carrying property.**

If it's at an unusual hour, unusual place, or if the property is not wrapped as if just purchased.

- **Someone going door-to-door in your neighborhood.**

Watch for awhile. If after a few houses are visited, one or more persons tries a door to see if it is locked, looks into windows, or goes into a back or side yard, it could be a burglar. Call Melbourne Police Department immediately; don't wait for the person to leave.

- **Traffic to and from a certain residence.**

It is not suspicious unless it occurs on a daily basis or very regular basis, especially during late or unusual hours.

- **Any vehicle moving slowly and without lights, or following a course that appears aimless or repetitive in any location.**

Particularly in areas of schools, parks and playgrounds. Occupants may be looking for places to rob or burglarize, or they could be drug pushers or sex offenders.

- **Parked vehicles containing one or more persons.**

If it is an unusual hour they could be lookouts for a burglary in progress.

- **An abandoned vehicle parked on your block.**

May be a stolen vehicle.

- **Continuous repair operations at non-business locations.**

It could mean stolen property is being stripped, repainted, or otherwise altered.

- **Persons making a quick change of vehicles.**

May be attempting to elude the police or abandoning a stolen vehicle.

- One or more juveniles walking through the neighborhood looking into automobiles or backyards.
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- Any person taking a shortcut through a backyard.

Once You Have Reported The Crime, Stick With It

It pays to prosecute. Many criminals who are arrested for property crimes are convicted. Being a witness in court is not as much trouble as you think. Some areas provide victims and witnesses with transportation, day-care services or follow-up counseling.

Application

After completing the presentation, have the group designate who the Neighborhood Watch Chairperson/Coordinator will be. They can designate individuals (Block Captains) to take charge of the responsibilities concerning the Neighborhood Watch group. Additionally, the group can work together with the Melbourne Police Department representative in creating an action plan, a personal property inventory list and a suspect/vehicle description form.

Conclusion

The key to keeping a Neighborhood Watch group active is maintaining interest over time. By getting everyone involved you will create a feeling of pride and the atmosphere of a small town, even if you live in a large city. Neighborhood Watch can easily be adapted to meet your needs, wherever you live or work.

Active Neighborhood Watch groups can make changes, through their local officials, such as improving street lighting, increasing extra patrol and changing traffic flow patterns. Active apartment or multi-family dwelling groups can make changes by working closely with their landlords or building managers. They can work together to improve lighting and security of individual units as well as communal areas and develop new policies or practices to improve building or property security.

Make belonging to your Neighborhood Watch group enjoyable. People will get involved and remain interested if the programs are fun as well as meaningful. Use your imagination. Schedule potluck dinners, organize clean-up campaigns or hold block parties. The possibilities are endless when neighbors unite and work together.

These are guidelines for your neighborhood watch. The Melbourne Police Department is here to assist you with your program. Help us, help you.