



Richardson Neighborhood Watch Program

Established 1983

The Neighborhood Watch program is a self-help community crime prevention program focusing on the reduction of crime and the opportunity for crime to occur.

More than 7 million residential burglaries are committed annually- one every ten seconds. With a continuation of this increase expected, closer cooperation between the police and the citizens they serve is mandatory. Because local governments most likely will be unable to pay the increased costs for additional police services, the Neighborhood Watch program can play an important role in the future of our communities.

Neighborhood Watch was created to obtain citizen involvement in discouraging and preventing residential crime. Neighborhood Watch programs are not designed to substitute for police protection. Rather, they supplement police activities by providing extra eyes, ears and caring. Neighborhood Watch is “people looking out for one another” and is considered a major deterrent against crime.

When neighbors know each other personally, they are more aware of each other’s habits and routines. This awareness can alert them to peculiarities and unusual events, such as strange cars or persons in the neighborhood. When neighbors know one another, they are more willing to get involved in reporting if they suspect a crime is occurring.

Neighborhood Crime Facts

- Burglary, auto theft, rape, crimes against children and arson are the most common neighborhood crimes.
- One of the more frequently committed crimes in the nation, residential burglary is one of the EASIEST crimes to commit, but one of the more difficult crimes to solve.
- Statistics show that in a significant number of household burglaries there is NO forced entry. In Richardson, nearly half of all reported residential burglaries are attributable to open garage doors.
- The majority of home burglaries occur during daylight hours (8 am to 5 pm).
- There is a potential for a violent confrontation when a property owner surprises a burglar.
- In a recent study conducted by the Sacramento County Sheriff, interviews were conducted with 25 convicted burglars serving time at Folsom State Prison. Twenty-three said that they avoided homes displaying Neighborhood Crime Watch stickers in the windows.

Neighborhood Watch Goals

As a Neighborhood Watch program is initiated within a neighborhood, planners and coordinators of the program should attempt to accomplish two goals---

- a 50% reduction in criminal victimization to those residents participating in the program.
- a 200% increase of citizen’s reports to police of crimes in progress.

To achieve these goals, the Richardson Police Department requires at least 40% of the occupied homes within the designated area to actively participate in the program.

The Neighborhood Watch program itself should:

- increase citizen awareness of criminal activity and its impact on the community.
- organize citizens into groups to channel individual and collective efforts into a coordinated neighborhood approach, utilizing specific crime prevention measures on an individual household and neighborhood basis.
- maintain a cooperative system of surveillance over one another's property, children, etc.
- encourage accurate and prompt reporting of crimes or suspicious activity in the neighborhood to police.
- mutually assist and encourage home security inspections, participation in *Operation Identification*, with the goal of "target-hardening" the entire neighborhood.
- maintain a continuing system (such as e-mail) for the dissemination of educational information relative to residential security, self-protection, and crime awareness.
- encourage citizens to come forward as witnesses (demonstrations of territorial concern will discourage criminals from returning to the area).

Many neighborhoods suffering from high crime rates have their own apathy to blame, since a neglected residential area's very appearance invites criminals. Fragile doors, open garages, unlocked doors and windows, dilapidated fences, overgrown yards, littered sidewalks, unmarked residences, dark streets, and alleys proclaim that the inhabitants have delegated responsibility entirely to the police.

However, criminals know that patrol officers cannot be everywhere at once and, calculating risks carefully, they know that their easiest targets lie in areas unwatched by its residents. The best deterrent to residential crime is neighbors who care, as hundreds of Crime Watch areas are proving.

Neighborhood Watch programs encourage residents to protect themselves and their property by securing their own homes and by reporting suspicious circumstances to the police. Neighborhood Watch programs are founded upon vigilance, not violence, and their purpose is to assist the authorities in maintaining security and surveillance, leaving enforcement to commissioned police.

Coordinator's/Captain's Role

- acts as liaison between the neighborhood and the police department.
- contacts a Crime Prevention Officer for any new material available and distributes pamphlets, newsletters, crime alerts, routine crime updates, and information to the neighborhood.
- maintains a contact list of members in the neighborhood.
- acts as an "information center" for the neighborhood.
- Coordinates meetings.
- is aware of senior residents with special needs.
- is alert to door-to-door solicitors.
- can assist in the removal of advertising flyers that may be left around unoccupied homes.
- reports unusual activities, pedestrian, or vehicular traffic, to other block watch members.
- conducts annual Neighborhood Crime Watch meeting.
- attends annual Leadership Meeting and any other training events sponsored by the police department.

Unless Neighborhood Watch organizations continue in pursuit of worthy goals, they will eventually stagnate and become inactive. Keeping neighbors united and generating a genuine effort to improve their quality of life is the most effective and worthwhile method to avoid the onset of apathy. Remember that a neighborhood's very appearance immediately signals to prospective intruders whether or not its residents are easy targets. Improving sidewalks, fences, landscaping, alleys, security lighting, home upkeep, and the overall appearance of the neighborhood demonstrates that neighbors care about themselves and their homes. Another way to remain active is to expand the group's training into fire prevention, first aid, home safety, and health issues.

Participant's Role is to---

- arrange for a security survey of their residence.
- improve home security/ harden the target/remove criminal opportunity.
- maintain an inventory of possessions and serial numbers.
- obtain phone numbers of neighbors in immediate proximity.
- give e-mail address, home and work phone numbers to block captain.
- notify neighbors and block captain when having work done on home, or when houseguests are coming and going (unfamiliar cars and people).
- report suspicious activity to the police department and is prepared to give detailed description of persons or vehicles.
- watch out for all unfamiliar vehicles and record description/license number if needed later.
- keep the home secure, locking doors/windows and closing the overhead garage door.
- always make the home appear occupied.
- plans for someone to pick up newspapers, mail and door flyers when away.

Guidelines for Neighborhood Watch Areas

I. New Neighborhood Watch areas

- A. An initial meeting must be held with a minimum of 40% of the currently occupied households in attendance. A Crime Prevention Officer must attend this meeting.
- B. Installation of crime watch signs require approval of the Crime Prevention office. The initial fee for sign installation and maintenance is \$25 per sign. The City of Richardson retains ownership of each sign. Installed signs are subject to removal in the event a crime watch becomes inactive.

II. Established Neighborhood Watch areas

- A. It is mandatory for each crime watch area to hold at least one meeting per year with at least 40% of the occupied households represented to maintain an active status. Upon request, a Crime Prevention Officer or Patrol Officer *may* be available to attend the meeting, but it is not required. The Coordinator or Block Captain then must notify the Crime Prevention Unit of the date and attendance record of the meeting.
- B. Attendance at the annual Leadership Meeting (or any other training events) is also mandatory to maintain an active status.
- C. Expansion of an existing watch area will be approved only after the 40% attendance record is met for the existing area. Coordinators of each crime watch area may contact a Crime Prevention Officer monthly for their area crime statistics. Crime Prevention Officers will alert Coordinators in areas where major or repeated offenses occur.
- D. The Crime Prevention Unit must be notified of any changes in Coordinators or Block Captains. A Crime Prevention Officer will then make the appropriate updates in the databases to ensure that communiqués and mail outs go to the new person(s) responsible for that crime watch area.
- E. E-mail is utilized as a primary communication tool between Crime Prevention and crime watch members for routine communiqués as well as crime alerts requiring special attention. Each Coordinator (or a Block Captain) should make certain their Crime Prevention Officer has at least one primary e-mail address (Coordinator or Block Captain) for that crime watch area. The Crime Prevention

Officer will routinely send crime alerts to those primary contacts. Unless addressed specifically to them, the Coordinators should forward the alerts to their own e-group within their crime watch area. For those without e-mail, a phone call or delivery of a printout of the alert should be provided.

- F. E-mail makes it easy for Coordinators and Block Captains to communicate with their block members as well as their Crime Prevention Officer. Anyone with a question or an inquiry can contact any Crime Prevention Officer at their individual addresses. However, we ask that you also “copy” your Coordinator or Block Captain as a courtesy to keep everyone in the information loop.

START A NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH TODAY!

CONTACT THE CRIME PREVENTION UNIT AT

(972) 744-4955

Also, go to the website at www.richardsonpolice.net for information on Sex Offender Registration, City Ordinances, crime statistics, crime alerts, and other resources.

The definition of Crime Prevention is—*“the anticipation, recognition and appraisal of a crime risk, and the initiation of some action to remove or reduce it (the risk).”*