



# **Neighborhood Crime Watch TOOL KIT**

*A Guide to  
Starting, Organizing & Maintaining  
Your Neighborhood Crime Watch*

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# Crime Watch Basics

## What is Neighborhood Crime Watch?

A Neighborhood Crime Watch is an organization that helps residents in a particular neighborhood: prevent or reduce crime in that neighborhood, develop a positive rapport with law enforcement, and become the "eyes and ears" for law enforcement. At Crime Watch meetings, residents discuss and plan potential solutions to address the area's crime problems. Neighborhood Crime Watch is also a great way to meet and get to know your neighbors, which enhances everyone's safety in the neighborhood.

### Neighborhood Crime Watch groups are organizations that:

- teach citizens techniques to reduce the risk of being victimized at home and in public.
- train citizens to recognize and report suspicious activities.
- teach participants how to make their homes more secure and how to properly identify their property.
- allow neighbors to get to know each other and their routines so that unusual activity can be reported and investigated.
- bring citizens together to address the needs and issues that concern the entire community.

### Neighborhood Crime Watch groups are not:

- vigilante forces working outside the normal procedures of law enforcement.
- programs designed for participants to take personal risks to prevent crime.
- a 100% guarantee that crime will not occur in your neighborhood.

### The leader of the Neighborhood Crime Watch program is:

A block coordinator/captain is the person or persons that will

- organize "block" activity
- distribute crime prevention and community information to members of the group
- represent their area or section at other Neighborhood Crime Watch activities in the community
- help distribute information about other types of activity taking place in your community.
- complete a block map or roster containing first and last names, addresses, contact numbers and emails of all residents in their neighborhood

## How Do I Start a Neighborhood Crime Watch Group?

You can easily start a Neighborhood Crime Watch by following the steps below:

**Step 1:** Call the New Braunfels Police Department and let them know you are interested in starting a neighborhood watch program. Discuss the types of crime or issues that are prevalent in your neighborhood, and what type of neighborhood you live in (apartment, subdivision, rural homes, etc.).

**Step 2:** Compile accurate crime and disorder facts using City of New Braunfels resources to include CrimeReports.Com, CrimeWeb.net and historical data from residents.

**Step 3:** Contact your neighbors to find out who is interested. Visit them door-to-door. Going door-to-door is a great way to promote Neighborhood Crime Watch, but TAKE SOMEONE WITH YOU.

Never walk door-to-door alone. (Note: residents are more likely to open the door to a man and woman than to two men.) When you talk to your neighbors, discuss crime and issues in your area, explain the value of the program, and determine a good time to schedule the first meeting. Keep a list of everyone's preferences and write down their comments.

**Step 4:** Plan a get-together along with a representative from your law enforcement staff. Coffee, baked goods and lemonade or soft drinks can be served.

## How Many People Do I Need to Participate?

It can be as many people as want to participate where you live. The NBPD must officially recognize a Crime Watch organization before signs in your neighborhood may be installed.

## What are Crime Watch Roles and Responsibilities?

Roles and responsibilities within a Crime Watch group can and will vary from neighborhood to neighborhood depending on availability of volunteers. Here are some examples you might consider.

### Neighborhood Coordinator

- *Coordinates* activities of Block Captains and Block Watchers
- *Recruits* neighborhood residents into the Crime Watch program.
- *Acts as a liaison* with the police department and the neighborhood
- *Distributes information* – use web and email
- *Plans and conducts crime watch meetings* as needed
- *Develops communication systems* and maintains a phone/email tree

### Block Captain

Works with the Neighborhood Coordinator to:

- *Host a Crime Watch meeting* for the people on their block
- *Recruit neighborhood residents* into the Crime Watch program by visiting each home, apartment, and/or business in their block, announcing the meeting and encouraging neighbors to participate
- *Contact neighbors* who have not responded to fliers, emails or participated in the program
- *Distribute Crime Prevention materials* to those residents who were unable to attend meetings
- *Serve as a base station for Operation Identification*; neighbors pick up Operation Identification materials from their Block Captain in order to participate in the program — the higher the percentage of participation, the higher the effectiveness of this program
- *Be a liaison* between the residents and the Neighborhood Coordinator, assist Neighborhood Coordinator by communicating with law enforcement representatives
- *Promote and distribute* a copy of all scheduled Crime Watch meetings, upcoming events, and special activities to everyone on their block

## **Block Watcher**

- *Acts as eyes and ears* for their neighbors and reports suspicious activities.
- *Studies crime prevention materials* furnished to them
- *Checks neighbors' homes* when they are out of town
- *Cooperates and assists* the Block Captain.
- *Participates* in Operation Identification

**How Much Time Do I Have to Spend?** As much or as little time as you want.

**How Can I "Sell" the Idea of a Neighborhood Crime Watch To My Neighbors?**

**Tell your neighbors that:**

- Neighborhood Crime Watch is a return to the "old-fashioned" days when neighbors took care of neighbors and communicated with police.
- The program helps reduce the risk of becoming a crime victim.
- It helps a community become stronger and more unified.
- It generates a concern of neighbors for each other. For instance, during bad weather, whether hot or cold, neighbors can check in on other neighbors.
- Neighborhood Crime Watch lets neighbors know that someone will be there in case of a personal crisis such as a fire, flood, or crime.
- There is greater access to criminal activity information.
- Having a Neighborhood Crime Watch sign posted lets criminals know that the neighborhood is not an easy target. Convicted burglars have reported avoiding neighborhoods that have these signs.
- It gives neighbors an opportunity to have block parties, covered dish suppers, or a street dance.
- It's an opportunity to beautify the neighborhood.
- Neighborhood Crime Watch provides a forum for programs and an opportunity to meet officials in the community.
- It is a network of different neighborhoods working together.

**How does my Law Enforcement Representative Help with a Neighborhood Crime Watch?**

All crime prevention programs provided by your local law enforcement representative are FREE! Community presentations are available for almost any topic and there are several on programs and web based resources for you and the neighborhood.

**How Does my Neighborhood Crime Watch Group Get Crime Watch Signs?**

Signs and installation may be available free of charge, occasionally the Neighborhood Crime Watch group may be required to assist in funding.

**Are background checks conducted for participants in a Neighborhood Crime Watch program?**

The New Braunfels Police Department does not routinely conduct background checks on Neighborhood Crime Watch members. However, any suspicious activity should be immediately reported to the New Braunfels Police Department for investigation.

# The First Meeting

## Where Do I Have the Meeting?

Meetings can be held in a backyard, den, kitchen, basement, porch, or an apartment. If you think your group is too large to meet in a home, plan to have the meeting in a meeting room at the New Braunfels Police Department, New Braunfels Public Library, local faith-based organizations or other facilities in the City.

## How Do I Plan Our First Meeting?

(Check off as you complete the following):

1. Set the date, secure a location and contact the New Braunfels Police Department and Safe City Commission to request a representative at <http://www.nbtexas.org/index.aspx?nid=321> or 221-4100
2. Hand out a flyer or send an email to all the members of the neighborhood. You can also attach a letter explaining the crime watch program in more depth.
3. Publicize the meeting and create neighborhood interest. Post notices and flyers. Remember word-of-mouth is a great way to advertise
4. Prepare an agenda with a list of the items that need to be discussed.
5. Determine in advance time limits for each agenda item
6. Plan on appointing a timekeeper for the meeting. A timekeeper can politely keep your meeting from running too long
7. Estimate the number of families (people) in your neighborhood
8. Invite someone from an adjacent or nearby Crime Watch to attend and provide success stories

## A Sample First Meeting Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions, Thank everyone for coming.
- Explain your reason for calling the meeting and discuss your reasons/concerns you and your neighbors have about crime in your area. (See examples below).
- Determine if there is enough interest in your area to start a Neighborhood Crime Watch. Many believe that there should be at least 50% of residents in neighborhood participating in all meetings and activities to maintain a Neighborhood Crime Watch. This isn't necessarily correct, but certainly should be your goal.
- Pass around a contact sheet on which everyone will write down their names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers. This information will be put on a block map and distributed to everyone later.
- Determine date for next meeting, who will bring light refreshments, and whether children may attend. If your meeting is in a church, school, recreation center, etc., pre-arrange to use the facility roughly a month in the future, so the next meeting date can be announced at the initial meeting.
- *Introduction of law enforcement representative.* Topic will be the basics of a Neighborhood Crime Watch.
- Make a list of what topics the participants are interested in hearing about for future meetings.

## Reasons for Crime Watch

Discuss the concerns you have about your area such as the following (check all that apply):

- need for neighborhood association and sense of community
- over-turned garbage cans
- broken glass
- child safety
- noise
- peeping toms
- prowlers
- auto/property vandalism
- garden/garden supply theft
- farm equipment theft
- livestock/crop theft
- vacant buildings
- accumulation of hazardous junk in yards and alleys
- burglaries
- other \_\_\_\_\_

After you discuss the concerns, determine if you and your neighbors really feel there is a need for a Neighborhood Crime Watch. Hopefully, your law enforcement representative will help you "sell" the idea of a Neighborhood Crime Watch by using some or all of the reasons above.

## Some tips for a successful meeting

- Good lighting.
- Comfortable room temperature.
- Seating arrangement - a semi-circle usually works best since it enhances eye contact, and encourages better interaction among members of the group.
- Inexpensive refreshments - KEEP THESE SIMPLE!
- Be sure to have a specific purpose and an agenda for each meeting. Some flexibility is necessary but do not ramble since it is confusing and boring to those attending the meeting. It is helpful to assign time limits for each agenda item as well as a time keeper.
- Hold the meeting to the announced time frame.
- Avoid "war stories", personal anecdotes, or "soap box" techniques since they can be misleading and disruptive to the meeting. Your law enforcement representative's time, your time, and the time of those attending the meeting needs to be carefully monitored.
- Briefly review key points discussed at the last meeting.
- Prepare materials in advance such as displays or crime prevention devices. Be sure displays are clearly visible and labeled for those present.
- No meeting should last longer than 60 minutes.
- If the speaker has no timepiece in direct view, be sure to indicate by a hand signal that time is almost up. Allow the speaker a chance to conclude remarks.
- Do not delay your meeting for the sake of "important" persons who have not arrived. Delaying a meeting can cause serious inconveniences for those already present who may have other commitments.
- Do not interrupt the meeting while those who are tardy make excuses for being late. Continue with your remarks.
- Share the bulk of the information. You do not need to lecture.
- Refer to prepared notes and index cards with clear, legible print. You do not need to memorize the material.

- If you plan to read directly from printed material, MARK the items with paper clips or markers so it can be found quickly. Fumbling is boring and time consuming and can lose attention.
- Say it just as you see it or as if you were talking to your own best friend.
- To avoid monotony, change pace by asking questions such as "Mr. X, have you ever considered what you'd do with this kind of problem?" Limit this though to avoid losing continuity.
- To keep interest, plan an activity such as filling out forms, pose a "problem" situation for discussion, or show slides.
- Arrange your agenda in units so that the meeting can end at any point. There is no way to determine exactly how much time it will take to cover certain material. Even if the meeting doesn't take the full amount of time, do not introduce a new topic that must be cut off before it is discussed in full.
- Do not cram too much into one meeting. Everything will keep until next time!

## **Sample letter of invitation**

Use a letter of invitation in conjunction with flyer to promote the first meeting.

Dear Fellow Resident,

Neighborhood Crime Watch is a very effective program to prevent many crimes such as burglaries, assaults and drug dealing. Neighborhood Crime Watch promotes awareness that will help ensure the safety of you, your loved ones, and your neighbors

I want to see if there is interest in starting a Neighborhood Crime Watch group for our block (neighborhood?). I hope that you will join me at my house on [date] at [time] at [address]. Together, we can help keep crime off our block (out of our neighborhood?) for good.

Sincerely,

[name]

[phone number]

# Neighborhood Crime Watch in Action

## We've got a group going. What do we do now?

The best thing about Neighborhood Crime Watch is that it is so easy. Looking out for your neighbors takes very little time, and it benefits everyone.

### What to do:

- Exchange basic information with trusted neighbors: home and work telephone numbers, daily routine of your family, planned vacations or visitors, scheduled deliveries and repairs, and your alarm system.
- Report any unusual or suspicious activities to the New Braunfels Police by calling 911. Don't hesitate to call; there is a direct connection between an increase in calls for service and a reduction in crime!
- Make note of the descriptions of suspicious persons and vehicles. Write down license plate numbers and directions of travel. Take note of the color of the vehicle, what the suspicious persons was wearing, time of day, etc. Give as much specific information as possible.
- Keep neighbors informed of houses that will be unoccupied for extended periods of time.
- Look after neighbors' houses when they are away. Volunteer to collect their mail, newspapers and other deliveries. A stack of several newspapers is a good indication to a burglar that no one is home!
- Consider an email or voice mail system
- Request Neighborhood Crime Watch Signs. Signs alert criminals to the fact that they are entering a Crime Watch neighborhood.
- Consider establishing a regularly scheduled email newsletter.
- **LET THE POLICE APPREHEND CRIMINALS. NEVER PUT YOURSELF IN DANGER.**

## What Are Suspicious Activities?

If you detect any suspicious activity in your neighborhood or anywhere, call the New Braunfels Police Department. Do not worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove to be unfounded. It is better to think of what could happen if you didn't act.

### Examples of Suspicious Activity

#### Suspicious Persons

1. Door-to-door canvassers in a residential area. This is especially suspicious if, after a few houses have been visited, one or more of the subjects go into the back or side yard. If one remains in the front yard while this occurs, the situation is even more suspicious. They could be "casing the house" for a burglary. There may be a burglary in progress, or it could be a soliciting violation or trespass in progress.
2. People waiting in front of a house where the occupants are absent, or loitering in front of a business establishment which is closed. There may be a burglary or vehicle theft in progress.
3. Someone forcing entrance to or tampering with a residence, business, vehicle, etc. This person is suspicious under almost any circumstance. There may be a burglary in progress.
4. Non-resident going into back or side yard of house - possible burglary may be in progress.
5. Person running - especially if he or she is carrying something of value. The person may be fleeing the scene of a crime.
6. Person carrying property - may be suspicious depending on the circumstances. For example, if the person is observed at an unusual hour or in an unusual place and if the property is not wrapped as if just purchased, the situation may indicate a crime in progress.
7. Exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms. The person may be injured, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or in some kind of need of medical aid.

## **Suspicious Situations Involving Property**

1. Property in homes, private garages, storage areas, etc. This is suspicious when there are large or unusual accumulations of property (such as several TV sets in a garage which are new and not being used). The property may be stolen.
2. Property in a vehicle - not suspicious if the property is normally found in vehicles. This property may be stolen if you observe it at unusual hours, particularly TV sets, stereos, unmounted tape decks or auto parts.
3. Property carried by persons on foot - normally not suspicious unless at an unusual hour or in an unusual place. This situation is especially questionable if the person is running and/or the property is not wrapped as if just purchased.
4. Property being removed from or being placed in vehicles or buildings. This situation is suspicious if odd hours or places are involved, for example, from closed businesses or residences whose owners are known to be absent.

## **Other Unusual Situations**

1. Continuous "repair" operations at a non-business location. It is possible that stolen property is being stripped, refinished or altered in some other way.
2. Broken windows or doors at closed businesses or residences where the owners are absent.
3. Unusual noises - gunshots, screaming, sounds of combat, abnormally barking dogs - anything, which suggests foul play or illegal activity.

## **Suspicious Vehicles**

1. Certain moving vehicles - slow-moving vehicles without lights which seem to be following no deliberate path. This is suspicious in any location, but especially in school areas, parks and playgrounds. The occupants of the car may be "casing" for sex offenses, drug pushing or for places to rob.
2. Certain parked, occupied vehicles - may contain one or more persons. This situation is especially significant if observed at an unusual hour in a commercial area. The car may indicate a lookout for a burglary in progress.
3. Vehicles being loaded with valuables - suspicious if parked in front of a closed business or vacant residence - even if the vehicle is a legitimate-looking commercial vehicle.
4. Abandoned vehicle - possibly stolen.
5. Vehicle containing weapons - suspicious under most circumstances - may be used for criminal activity.
6. Other unusual activities involving vehicles:
  - persons attempting forcibly to enter a vehicle
  - persons "stripping" a car, especially at night or in parking lots
  - apparent business transactions in a vehicle, especially if around schools or parks, involving juveniles; possible drug sales
  - person being forced into vehicles - especially if females or juveniles

## **How Do I Report Suspicious Activity or a Crime?**

1. Call the New Braunfels Police. Dial 911 for emergencies or dial the non-emergency number 221-4100
2. Identify yourself by your name and address and relay the information. *Example: I am Jane Smith of 16 Rose Street, a member of Neighborhood Crime Watch. There is a suspicious person prowling around my neighbor's house at 14 Rose Street.*
3. Give the exact location of the crime or activity.
4. Use active, present tense verbs. *There is a burglary in progress or there is suspicious activity in progress and there is someone there now...*
5. Remain in contact with the dispatcher until all of the necessary information has been obtained.
6. Do not personally confront the situation. Await the arrival of a New Braunfels Police officer.

In an emergency, when reporting an incident to the New Braunfels Police Dept., you may be asked to repeat the address. This is to ensure that the address is correct and understood. While the dispatcher is asking you questions, which may seem indirectly related to the actual incidence of the crime, such as your name and address, a patrol car has already been dispatched to the scene of the emergency. The additional information may be required in order to determine the need for more emergency equipment. All information is kept confidential.

## **Care Enough to Call**

If any of the above situations deemed suspicious are observed, the citizen is advised to call the New Braunfels Police Department and report:

1. What has happened
2. Where it happened
3. When it happened
4. If anyone was injured
5. License number of suspicious vehicle
6. Description of suspicious vehicle
7. Description of suspicious persons
8. In what direction the suspicious vehicle/suspicious person went

## **What response to expect in regard to your call:**

If the crime is in progress, e.g., the burglar is still in your home or your neighbor's home, your call will be answered immediately. When making your call, **BE SURE TO USE THE WORDS "IN PROGRESS!"**

If the crime has already been committed, e.g., you have come home and found your home has been burglarized, a slower response should be expected. The first priority in answering calls is for crimes in progress. Once these calls have been answered, the officer will go to the requested location.

## **What Else Do Neighborhood Crime Watch Organizations Do?**

### **Operation Identification Program**

The Operation Identification Program deters burglars, assists in arrest and prosecution of criminals, and facilitates the return of stolen property.

An engraver is available from the Police Department. Call 830-221-4100 to verify availability of the engraver. It can be loaned to you for a three-day period with valid driver's license. Block captains can borrow the engraver and let the whole neighborhood take turns engraving their property.

Guidelines:

- Mark valuables by inscribing your driver's license number followed by the letters TX. *Example: A-123-456-789-321 TX. Do NOT use your social security number.*
- Complete two copies of a property list. Provide a description of the item, its make, model, size, color, serial number, purchase date and amount.
- Photograph, in color, all valuables that cannot be marked (china, silver, furs, jewelry, etc.) and file with the property list.
- List and file credit card companies, phone numbers and account numbers with the property list.
- Keep one copy of the property list at home, and another in a safe deposit box or other secure location.
- Display Operation Identification stickers in visible places, like a front window or door, and the garage door.

## **Home Security Survey Program**

Crime prevention begins at home through improved home security. The New Braunfels Police Department will conduct a FREE home security survey on request. The survey will identify problem areas and will provide guidance for their correction.

Encourage your neighbors to:

- Improve the security of their residences.
- Identify any potential points of vulnerability.
- Correct those security weaknesses.

Remember: If a burglar can be denied entry into your home for five minutes, statistics show that he will leave for an easier target.

## **Participate in National Night Out**

National Night Out is an annual event designed to build upon the partnership between the community and law enforcement. National Night Out occurs every October in Texas and continues to gain mass, momentum and feeling as it bonds diverse elements of our community. Besides being loads of fun, this event is educational and beneficial to every community that participates.

### **Suggested events**

- Have everyone in the neighborhood display their outdoor lights
- Organize "front porch vigils"
- Block parties
- Cookouts or pot luck meals
- Request a visit (at least 30 days in advance) by local police, rescue squad, fire department, etc.
- Parades
- Flashlight walks
- Contests and games
- Youth programs
- Softball games
- Live music

# Keep Your Crime Watch Active

## Keep Up the Good Work!

It may be difficult to keep up the initial enthusiasm of the Neighborhood Crime Watch group. As crime is lessened in your area, residents may become less interested in attending meetings, while still remaining concerned about crime.

Our local law enforcement officers and the Crime Prevention Unit along with safe City Commission will continue to provide assistance to the leaders of your group by assigning someone to attend your monthly meeting to provide updated information on Department activities, crime analysis, selected training presentations, etc. District officers will monitor daily activities within your community, which may require additional training sessions or increased enforcement activity by our Patrol Division.

Strong leadership is essential to maintain the active involvement of the community in the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program. The program chairpersons and block captains, interested in the security of his or her neighborhood, are an asset in motivating the group to realize its objectives. The block captains may get involved in training other block captains as well as a replacement should he or she move from the community.

As crime is lessened within the community, citizens may broaden their scope to maintain the functioning of the group. Residents may concern themselves with the total quality of living in their neighborhood, for example, home beautification, cleanliness of the neighborhood, parks and recreational development. Community pride may be a strong motivation in maintaining the program. At all times, however, crime prevention should remain a priority of the program. The continued value of citizen involvement in protecting their neighborhood is the primary concern.

## Guidelines to Maintain an Active Crime Watch Program

- Schedule meetings every 90 days not to exceed 6 months between meetings.
- Be sure to give advance notice (about 30 days) of meetings.
- Review current crime trends in the area.
- Update participants on new crime prevention techniques.
- Provide social interaction.
- Update current list of members.

## How to Promote Meetings

There are several steps a block captain can take to promote meetings, and you DO NOT have to do it alone! Delegate tasks to others in your neighborhood. If everyone contributes just a few minutes of his or her time, promotion is easy!

- Post flyers about a month ahead of the meeting. You can copy and fill in the flyer on the next page, or you can get creative and make one of your own.
- Walk door-to-door, NEVER ALONE, and politely invite each neighbor to the meeting. "Hi, I'm Jane and I live at the end of the street. We are having a Crime Watch meeting next Monday night and I'd like to invite you to come." Remember to discuss why a Neighborhood Crime Watch is necessary in your area.
- Send an email to all your neighbors who have attended previously, suggest they bring a friend or neighbor.
- Call each person in the neighborhood a few days before the meeting to remind him or her. One person can call everyone in the neighborhood, or you can utilize a phone tree system.
- Recognizing that crime prevention is a serious issue, keep your meetings as positive as possible, so people feel good about coming.

## Participate in Collaborative Organizations

There are several opportunities for Neighborhood Crime Watch groups to collaborate with other like groups within our overall community. Some links are provided below:

## Social Functions

Every function of your Crime Watch group does not have to be a formal meeting. In fact, some of the most successful groups are those whose members get to know one another on a friendly level. Some examples that your group can sponsor are:

- Block parties/dances
- Neighborhood yard sales
- Movie nights
- Neighborhood clean-ups
- Adopt a neighborhood park or garden

## Some More Important Numbers and Web Links:

New Braunfels Emergency – In Progress	9-1-1
New Braunfels Police Non-Emergency	(830) 221-4100
City of New Braunfels	(830) 221-4000
New Braunfels Fire Department	(830) 221-4200
New Braunfels Municipal Court	(830) 221-4180
New Braunfels Code Enforcement	(830) 221-4074
Comal County Sheriffs Office	(830) 620-3400
Guadalupe Sheriffs Office	(830) 379-1224
Comal County District Attorney Office	(830) 221-1300
Guadalupe County District Attorney Office	(830) 303-1922
Crisis Center of Comal County	(830) 620-7520
Texas Attorney General Office	(512) 463-2100
Comal/New Braunfels Crime Stoppers	(830) 620-8477
New Braunfels Utilities	(830) 629-8400
Federal Trade Commission	(877) ID-Theft
Annual Credit Report	(877) 322-8228
Texas Runaway Hotline	(888) 580-HELP
National Missing & Exploited Kids	
Adult Protective Services	1-800-252-5400
Child Protective Services	(830) 252-5400
National Domestic Violence Hotline	(800) 799-SAFE
National Crime Prevention Council	
National Town Watch	
National Neighborhood Watch Institute	
Crimereports.com	
Crimeweb.net	
Texas Homeland Security	
Graffiti Hurts	

On-line web based reporting, including anonymous tips, is available at <http://nbpdtexas.com>