

# COMMUNITY NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK WATCH



## MISSION STATEMENT

**To Increase The Effectiveness Of The Grays Harbor County Sheriff's Office  
By Working In Partnership With The Community To  
Safeguard Life And Property And To Enhance  
The Quality Of Life In Our Neighborhoods**

# Block Watch Handbook

## *Introduction*

**The Block Watch Handbook was created to provide a written guide for citizens and law enforcement deputies to refer to for the operation of a block watch. This handbook cannot provide all the answers but it can help the community and the police work toward a common goal. The success of a block watch is directly related to the ongoing participation and support from each member of the watch.**

### *What is a Block Watch?*

**Each day crime and the fear of crime threaten communities. Residents change their plans and lifestyles based on the fear of going out after dark. Parents and children are afraid to use local parks where criminals meet and businesses refuse to put shops in areas they believe are unsafe. It often seems as if nothing can be done to make neighborhoods safer places in which to live and work. The block watch can help solve these problems.**

**Today, community policing allows the police and residents to work together to solve issues involving crime and social concerns in their community. Block watches are one of the original foundations of community policing and are referred to as the eyes and ears of law enforcement. Members look out for neighbors and their property and report suspicious activities to the police.**

**But, block watches are more than looking out for suspicious activity in neighborhoods. Through community mobilization, neighbors, businesses, co-workers and students form an active partnership in the community. Watches allow individuals the opportunity to discover common interests and goals that they share with their neighbors. The residents work to prevent the possibility of crime in their area and develop a sense of community spirit that encourages more activism.**

### **The Benefits of Joining**

- Having the fast track to reporting crime and unsafe conditions.
- Notifications about crime trends and scams in your neighborhood.
- Being a part of community crime prevention.
- Education on how to protect yourself and your property.
- Having the means to stop crime in your neighborhood.

# **Roles and Responsibilities of a Block Watch Member**

The block watch manager is the guide for the block watch. It is the responsibility of the manager to ensure that all participants are notified of upcoming block watch meetings by the use of the phone tree system, by email or the Neighborhood block watch website.

## **I. Role of a Block Watch Member:**

In order to maintain the sanctity of a neighborhood and the structure of a block watch, there are four objectives block watch members should practice:

- A.** Be the eyes and ears of law enforcement and be able to react to activity and suspicious persons without confrontation.
- B.** Teamwork - neighbors working together can solve problems.
- C.** Practice personal safety and security while out in the community.
- D.** Attend block watch meetings on a regular basis.

## **II. Block Watch Manager:**

- A.** Leads meetings.
- B.** Coordinates information with the police.
- C.** Delegates duties among representatives and members.
- D.** Develops agendas and finds guest speakers for meetings.

## **III. Block Watch Representative:**

- A.** Performs all the duties of a member.
- B.** Assists the manager in performing their duties.

## **IV. Block Watch Member:**

- A.** Attends meetings.
- B.** Works with other members on common goals.
- C.** Looks after residences when neighbors are away.
- D.** Supports the representative and manager in accomplishing goals.

## **Community Teamwork Fights Crime**

Working together, we can eliminate criminal activity and make our neighborhoods safer by:

- General awareness, being informed and not afraid to report criminal activity.
- Keeping an eye on our neighbor's house, especially when they are away on vacations, etc.
- Watching out for children and the elderly.
- Walking and riding patrols.
- Showing a "we care about our neighborhood" attitude which will deter criminal activity.
- Being alert for sources that cause neighborhood deterioration: drugs, graffiti, gangs, slums, trash.
- Becoming good witnesses.
- Maintaining programs, meetings, and activities that keep us all involved.
- Sticking together so no one has to go it alone.

### **Our Goals**

Neighborhood Block Watch is a community-minded effort to bring...

- Lawfulness
- Stability
- Peace
- Security
- Safety
- Order
- Cleanliness

...back to our neighborhoods.

The Watch looks for obvious signs of crimes in progress. In regards to crime, our motto is:

**"See it. Hear it. Report it"**

## **Things TO Remember**

Continue with your day to day activities, but be observant.

- Carry a note pad and pen with you.
- Document suspicious activity by writing down what you see, where it happened along with the date and time it occurred.
- Pass on the information to your block watch manager or representative. If it is an emergency call 911.

## **Watch Patrol Guidelines**

**Remember you do not have to be a watch patroller to be involved with block watch, but if you decide to patrol the neighborhood the following are some guidelines to follow.**

### **SCOPE OF POWER AND DUTIES OF THE WATCH PATROLLER**

- **A patroller does not possess Police powers.**
- **You cannot make an arrest. Do not confront, attempt to apprehend or arrest a suspected criminal.**
- **You cannot carry firearms, night sticks, mace or any type of weapon.**
- **You are not above the law. You must obey the law.**
- **A Watch Patroller's duty is to be a passive crime fighter:**
  - A high-visibility mobile crime deterrent.
  - A vigilant observer.
  - A good witness.
  - A thorough and accurate report writer.
  - A helpful friend to local law enforcement.
  - A person who sends a clear message to criminals that you don't tolerate crime in your neighborhood and that you are not afraid to report crime.

### **SUGGESTED ITEMS FOR PATROL**

- Flashlight.
- Pocket notebook and pen.
- Cell phone, if possible.
- Neighborhood Watch Identification and/or Driver's License.
- Appropriate dress for the weather.

### **STARTING PATROL**

- Patrol in random fashion at staggered times whenever possible.
- Team up with another patroller whenever possible.
- Notify someone that you are going on patrol and expected time of return.

### **PATROL SAFETY**

- NEVER put yourself in danger.
- Watch for slippery conditions and trip hazards.

- Do not go on private property.
- Do not confront a suspected criminal or attempt to make an arrest yourself.
- Patrol in pairs, if possible.
- Dress to be seen. The Watch Patrol is designed to be a crime deterrent as a result of the high visibility of patrollers. For your own safety, do not dress darkly or operate by stealth.

### **PATROL OBSERVATION**

- Be observant and vigilant.
- Look and listen for the unusual and suspicious, such as:
  - Open doors, garages and gates that are usually closed.
  - Suspicious persons and vehicles that don't belong in the neighborhood.
  - Sounds such as screaming, gunshots and broken glass.
  - Anyone or anything out of the ordinary for your neighborhood.
- You know your neighborhood. If it doesn't seem right - it probably isn't.

### **SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES THAT SHOULD BE REPORTED**

- Anyone who is looking into parked vehicles or windows.
- Anyone sitting in a parked vehicle - in front of a home, especially at an unusual hour.
- Anyone removing parts or license plates from a vehicle.
- Anyone going door-to-door without apparent reason.
- A stranger going into a backyard.
- A stranger going into an unoccupied or abandoned house.
- A stranger loitering around children.
- Vehicles cruising slowly back and forth on your street.
- Drug activity of any kind.
- Sounds of gunshots, screaming, someone in distress, broken glass, etc.
- Evidence of forced entry into houses and vehicles.
- Any obvious crime in progress.

### **NOTIFY THE POLICE AND FILE A REPORT ON THESE CRIMES / CONDITIONS**

- Drug trafficking.
- Teens - underage drinking and drugs / drunken and underage driving.
- Child neglect, endangerment and abuse.
- Theft, burglary and trespassing.
- Person brandishing or using a firearm or other weapon.
- Vandalism and graffiti.
- Domestic violence.
- Harassment, menacing and threatening behavior.
- Disorderly conduct and public nuisance.
- Public intoxication of a hostile or aggressive nature.
- Assault of any degree.
- Racial and hate crimes.
- Sexual, molestation and lewdness crimes of any type.
- Motor vehicle and pedestrian accidents.

- Any unsafe or endangering condition that poses an immediate threat.
- Theft of identity / fraud / forgery.
- Violent or malicious gang activity.
- Scam activity.
- Road rage.
- Reckless endangerment.

## **CALLS TO THE POLICE – EMERGENCY AND NON-EMERGENCY**

**Use discretion before you call.**

Is the incident or condition:

- An emergency?
- A non-emergency?
- A criminal or civil incident?

**Does the incident or condition require:**

- An immediate emergency call?
- A non-emergency call?
- A report to the block watch representative or manager only?

**Be professional, patient and as cooperative as you can. The dispatcher needs a certain amount of information to determine the coding, disposition and priority of your call.**

**Follow these guidelines:**

- Call **9-1-1** for crimes **in progress** and **emergency situations**.
- Call **360-533-8765** (Grays Harbor Dispatch) for **non-emergency** incidents.
- Stay on the line and give all information requested by the dispatcher.
- Be patient - the Police will respond as soon as possible. Police response depends on the patrol area they respond from and the priority of the call.
- Upon arrival of officers, immediately identify yourself to avoid confusion.
- Do not interfere with the Police investigation but be available for questions.

### **Anonymous Reporting**

If you decide you want to be anonymous that is fine, but remember there are certain situations where you will not be able to be anonymous. For example, if you are the victim of a crime and for prosecution reasons, dispatch needs your information and you will not be able to be anonymous. For suspicious subjects and/or activity, you can be anonymous and are encouraged to report it.

# Information Gathering

## Vehicles:

When gathering information on a suspicious vehicle or vehicles in general, it is a good practice to get as much information about the vehicle as possible. The following is information that will be beneficial to law enforcement:

**License Plate number:**

**Color:**

**Make:**

**Model:**

**Approximate year:**

**Older or Newer:**

If possible, list how many people are in the vehicle. Are they male or female, approximate age of the people occupying the vehicle.

## People:

When describing a suspicious person, again try to get as much information as possible regarding the suspicious person and/or persons. When gathering the information, describe the subject starting from top to bottom. **For example, the subject was a white male, in his early 20's, approximately 6'2, short brown hair, wearing a dark short sleeve shirt, blue jeans and dark colored shoes.**

**Describe what the subject was doing that was suspicious.**

- Was the subject walking around at an unusual period?
- Was the subject seen walking around a vacant residence or are the homeowners of the residence on vacation?
- Was the subject carrying anything with him?
- How many subjects are there?