

# Neighborhood Watch Handbook

## Hear It – See It – Report It



### Neighborhood Watch Promotes Neighborliness!

Neighborhood Watch programs provide residents with the feeling of ownership for their community by promoting the belief it is everyone's responsibility to see that their community is a safer place to live.

Neighborhood Watch encourages residents to be alert for suspicious activity in the area and interact with each other by exchanging information about work schedules, vacation plans, types of vehicles belonging to residents, etc. Regular monthly meetings offers residents' updated information on current crime trends and allows residents the opportunity to plan watch programs for their area. Do Neighborhood Watch programs really work? A recent study by the U.S. Department of Justice COPS Office found *"Across all eligible studies combined, Neighborhood Watch was associated with a reduction in crime."*

Some advantages of Neighborhood Watches include:

- Reduces crime and prevents crime
- Provides direct contact with the Police Department
- Increases awareness about activity in the Borough of Gibbsboro
- Helps neighbors get to know each other
- Assists the Police Department with crime prevention efforts

# Gibbsboro Police Department

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## **Neighborhood Crime Prevention: A Joint Responsibility**

The prevention of crime – particularly crime involving residential neighborhoods – is a responsibility that must be shared equally by law enforcement and private citizens. The fact is, the impact on crime prevention by law enforcement alone is minimal when compared with the power of private citizens working with law enforcement and with each other.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH is based on this concept of cooperation, and nationwide statistics prove that it works. When citizens take positive steps to secure their own property and neighbors learn how to report suspicious activity around their homes, burglary and related offenses decrease dramatically.

Posting Neighborhood Watch signs on your street and labels or decals in your windows tells a criminal that:

1. You are not an easy target
2. They are probably being watched
3. You have taken the steps necessary to deter crime in your neighborhood
4. When a member of a neighborhood watch sees a suspicious person or vehicle, or a crime in progress, they call the police to report it.

**You should *never* attempt to apprehend a suspect.  
This is the law enforcement officer's job.**

## **Is Your Neighborhood Vulnerable?**

**Crime feeds on apathy.** If people simply “mind their own business,” their entire neighborhood is vulnerable. *Is your neighborhood vulnerable?* Take the following test to help determine if you need a Neighborhood Watch Program.

1. Do you know all your neighbors?
  2. Do you watch your neighbors' house when they are away?
  3. Do your neighbors watch your home when you are away?
  4. Do you and your neighbors work together on neighborhood problems?
  5. If you hear or see something suspicious, do you call the police?
  6. Is your active involvement in your neighborhood and community important?
  7. Do you talk to the youth in your neighborhood?
  8. When you see youngsters misbehaving, do you correct them?
  9. Do you accept complaints about your children?
  10. Do you know what is going on in your neighborhood?
- The security of the community and its citizens depends upon the people themselves.
  - You and your neighbors are the ones who really know what is going on in your neighborhood.

- No police department can effectively protect life and property without the support and cooperation of the citizens it serves. They need your eyes and ears.
- Every citizen should be a Neighborhood Watch member...a concerned, public spirited person who watches their neighborhood and reports criminal activity to their local law enforcement agency.

## **How Did Neighborhood Watch Groups Start?**

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.

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.

## **The Neighborhood Watch Program**

The Neighborhood Watch program is an effective way to get the community involved in crime prevention. As police officers, we cannot be everywhere at once, so we depend on the community to act as our eyes and ears when we are not present. Who knows better, what is going on in the community than the residents that live there?

After your Neighborhood Watch Block is implemented, it is important to keep your group active in maintaining people's interest. Communicating and cooperating with your neighbors and the Gibbsboro Police Department is key.

**WATCH GROUPS are extra and are for reporting crime and suspicious behavior to Law Enforcement.**

***\*\*\*\*It's one of the most effective and least costly ways to prevent crime.\*\*\*\****

## How Neighborhood Watch Works

Each year, 10 million serious crimes – more than half of the nation’s total – go unreported. The Neighborhood Watch program is simply you and your neighbors working together and with your local police to reduce criminal opportunity on your street. Neighborhood Watch operates to educate participants in the principles of **deterrence, delay, and detection**. The program depends on a communication network organized with three levels of participants – the residents, block captains, and coordinator, and a local law enforcement representative.

Sound residential security practices and good locks are a **deterrent** since they eliminate the opportunity for an easy burglary.

**Delaying** a burglar for four minutes is generally considered sufficient to prevent entry into a house or apartment. A burglar wants to avoid being caught, so the longer it takes to force a door or window the greater his risk. The burglar wants to avoid making noise - like breaking glass or smashing doors - and he want to avoid attracting attention. It is nearly impossible to make a house or apartment impregnable - but it is relatively easy and inexpensive to make forced entry difficult and to delay the burglar.

Finally, the fear of **detection** is the third element of burglary prevention. The possibility of detection is increased if you can delay a burglar, if you can force him to work where he can be observed, and if he will have to make noise or attract attention. Alarms on doors and windows are the surest way to detect a burglar, but watchful neighbors alert to unusual activity who will notify law enforcement authorities are an effective means of detection.

Keeping in mind the principles of **deterrence, delay and detection**, you can take positive steps to decrease the likelihood that your house or apartment will be burglarized. Take time to conduct your own security check. Take time to put your house in order. Then talk to your neighbors about how you can help each other keep your entire neighborhood safe.

The police department needs your help to function effectively. But your neighbors are there. They know you and your family, what type of car you drive and when you will be away. Your neighbor could be the first to spot a burglar in your window or a strange car in your driveway.

## How to Organize a Neighborhood Watch

The need for neighbors to look out for each other is the basis of Neighborhood Watch. This program encourages and educates residents on how to act as the eyes and ears of the police department.

### Eligible Groups

Any adult group representing individual households in the same geographical area may be considered a Neighborhood Watch group and can receive Neighborhood Watch signs to designate their participation.

## **Geographical Area**

The geographical area of each individual Neighborhood Watch group is determined by the residents (s) who are organizing the neighborhood for the program. If the organizer wishes to have a dozen homes or two hundred homes involved is entirely up to them...not the police department.

## **Getting Started**

The Crime Prevention Officer and the organizing community member should initially meet to discuss starting a Neighborhood Watch. The concept of Neighborhood Watch and pertinent information will be provided by the Crime Prevention Officer. After this meeting, the community member should canvass the neighborhood for interest and participation from the neighbors with the information supplied by the Crime Prevention Officer.

Contact as many of your neighbors as possible, asking them:

- If they feel at risk of being burglarized or being the victim of other crimes;
- If they have taken any steps to protect their homes; and
- If they would be willing to attend a meeting to organize a Neighborhood Watch group in your area.

*You may be surprised to learn how many of your neighbors' lives have already been touched by crime!*

## **The First Meeting**

1. Select a convenient time (far enough in advance to give everyone adequate notice)
2. Distribute a flyer announcing the meeting
3. Hold the meeting in the home of a neighbor or nearby facility.
4. Distribute name tags and have a sign-in sheet (name, address, phone & e-mail info)
5. Law enforcement will explain the concept of Neighborhood Watch.
6. Draw a large map of all the streets and households to be covered by your Neighborhood Watch organizations. (Start with a manageable number of homes at first, you can always add other areas)
7. Select a chairperson and block captains (explaining duties of each)
8. Select a time and place for the follow-up meeting

## **The Second Meeting**

Neighborhood Watch training for all neighbors. (presented by the Crime Prevention Unit or the Community Resource Officer)

1. How to report a crime
2. How to recognize suspicious activity

3. Discuss programs offered through the Neighborhood Watch
4. Explain phone chain and the benefits it provides
5. Stress to all members this is their neighborhood watch. The success of the program is their active participation/involvement.

## **Roles & Responsibilities in Neighborhood Watch**

### **Chairperson**

- Arrange for meetings and crime prevention programs.
- Communicate with the block captain's information received from the police.
- Receive and report information from block captains to the police.
- Keep updated list on residents
- Maintain contact with the police.

The appointment of the proper Chairperson can determine the success of the program. This person should have an ability to communicate well and have some free time for activities. The Chairperson is responsible for presiding over all meetings.

### **Block Captain**

- Assists the chairperson in passing information to and from the residents on their block. Keep in touch with the chairperson.
- Welcome new neighbors and encourage joining Neighborhood Watch.

The Block Captains have one of the most important functions in the Neighborhood Watch program, supervising the actual citizen participants who join Neighborhood Watch in their communities. The Block Captain is responsible for one block or similar designated territory. The duties of the Block Captain will offer very little change in lifestyle for the resident involved. Rather, it will provide a means for meeting your neighbors as well as helping make your community a safer place to live.

### **Police**

- Keep the community informed of crime trends and potential problems.
- Attend meetings.
- Conduct training sessions on crime prevention topics.
- Maintain contact with the chairperson.
- Inform fellow officers of neighborhood concerns.

Neighborhood Watch fights the isolation that crime both creates and feeds upon.

## **Neighborhood Watch Do's & Don'ts**

### **Do:**

- Report suspicious activity immediately to the police, not the Neighborhood Watch coordinator or Block Captain.
- Report all crimes to the police.
- Learn what's normal in your neighborhood.
- Take a pro-active stance against crime.
- Encourage others to participate in Neighborhood Watch, invite new residents to join neighborhood watch.
- Attend Neighborhood Watch meetings.
- Obtain full descriptions and license numbers of suspicious people and their vehicles and report immediately to the police.
- Participate in operation identification.

### **Don't:**

- Don't take the law into your own hands.
- Don't approach suspicious people. You should *never* attempt to apprehend a suspect
- Don't stop criminals committing crimes.
- Don't pull over cars on patrol or any time.
- Don't take unnecessary risks to obtain information on suspicious people or crimes.
- Don't hesitate to call police.



## **Hear It • See It • Report It**

### **Benefits of a Neighborhood Watch Program**

The eight most important benefits of being involved in your own Neighborhood Watch program are:

1. Neighborhood policing by you and your neighbors, together with your own police or sheriff, creates a greater sense of security, well-being, and reduction of fear or crime because you know you and your neighbors will "...LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER."
2. Reduces the risk of being a crime victim.
3. The Neighborhood Watch program trains you how to observe and report suspicious activities occurring in your neighborhood.
4. Knowing your neighbors is an important feature and benefit of this program. ..."WE LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER."
5. You have greater access to criminal activity information.
6. Participants get on-going training in how to protect themselves.
7. Posting Neighborhood Watch signs on your street and labels or decals in your windows tells a criminal that:
  - (a) you are not an easy target,
  - (b) they are probably being watched and
  - (c) you have taken the steps necessary to deter crime in your neighborhood.
8. Address issues of mutual interest by getting together with your neighbors on a regular basis (monthly, quarterly, or whatever you wish).

### **Making it Tough for the Burglar**

Through Neighborhood Watch Programs, determined citizens are decreasing their chances of becoming victims. Alert program participants in communities across the country are making things hard for potential criminals by:

- Arranging for home security inspections by crime prevention officers to identify security vulnerabilities;
- Upgrading locks, security hardware, and lighting; and installing alarms when security inspections show particular hazard;
- Training family members to keep valuables secure and to lock doors and windows when leaving home; it is a good practice to keep doors lock when anyone is at home or not;
- Asking neighbors to watch for suspicious activity when the house is vacant;
- Marking valuable property with an identifying number (Operation I.D.) to discourage theft and help law enforcement agencies identify and return lost or stolen property;
- Encouraging home builders to use effective door and window locks and to provide outside lighting for all new home and apartment construction;

- Organizing block parent and block watch groups to assist children, the elderly, and other especially vulnerable persons if they appear to be distressed, in danger, or lost;
- Meeting in neighborhood groups with trained crime prevention officers to discuss needs and crime prevention strategies;
- Developing neighborhood “fan” or telephone tree systems for quickly alerting each other about criminal activity in the area;
- Encouraging the development of signals for use in adjacent residences when someone needs help;
- Arranging for ongoing programs where crime prevention experts can present home and neighborhood security tips at regularly scheduled meetings.
- Identifying the area’s participation with decals and metal road signs warning, “Neighborhood Watch – our neighbors are watching to report suspicious activity to our law enforcement agency

## How to Report

Law enforcement officers need to have accurate information as quickly as possible about a suspicious activity or crimes in progress.

- Give your name, address and telephone number. (The operator will ask you this even if you call on 9-1-1 in order to confirm the information.)
- Describe the event in as brief a manner as possible.
- Where, When, How, Why, and Who did it?
- Describe the suspect, if known. What sex, race, age, height, weight, hair color, clothing, accent, beard or mustache, and distinctive characteristics or clothing.
- Describe the vehicle if one was involved. What color, make, model, year, license plate, special markings, dents, which way did it go?
- Stay on the line until the operator advises they have all the information needed. (Note the operator's name or ID number)

*Practicing to develop skill in providing quick, accurate descriptions is an excellent Neighborhood Watch meeting activity. In attempting to describe events, vehicles, or persons, write down the details of what you have observed while they are still fresh in your mind, so your descriptions to law enforcement officials will be as accurate as possible.*

## **Suspicious Activity**

An important responsibility of Neighborhood Watch members is to report anything suspicious to the Police Department.

Look for:

- Strange persons loitering around your neighbor's house while the neighbor is away.
- Business transactions conducted from a vehicle or merchandise offered at a ridiculously low price.
- Strange automobiles or vans that are cruising in the neighborhood with no apparent business.
- Anyone removing parts of a car, such as radios, batteries, tires, and license plates, who does not appear to be the owner.
- A person who seems to have no purpose wandering in the neighborhood.
- Is that suspicious person removing property from a neighbor's residence a moving man, or is it someone committing a burglary? When in doubt – call.
- Broken or open doors or windows.
- Vehicles moving slowly, without lights, or with no apparent destination.
- You hear glass breaking – burglar or neighbor has had an accident and cut himself?
- Persons walking down the street repeatedly peering into parked cars.
- Someone going door-to-door in the neighborhood or looking into windows and parked cars.
- Someone screaming. If you can't determine what the screams are for, call the Police Department and report it.
- A stranger in a car stopping to beckon to a child.
- A stranger carrying appliances, luggage, pillowcase or other bundles from a neighbor's house.

## The Crime Triangle

When hearing the words, Crime Triangle, what comes to your mind? Yakuza? Russian Mafia? Italian Mafia? Chicago Mafia? LA Street Gangs? Bermuda Triangle? Cape Fear? All of these groups and areas tend to conjure up images of violent criminals and sustainable crime. However, the crime triangle is something much more benign. It is an understanding and awareness of how crime happens. By understanding the process, you, as an individual, can significantly decrease your chances of becoming a potential victim. Contrary to popular belief, the boogeyman doesn't just jump out of the bushes to attack you. Crime is a process and often follows a pattern.

Let's take a journey back to middle school and fire awareness training. We were all trained that fire cannot happen unless three things are present: an ignition source, fuel and oxygen. If you remove any one of these components, you remove the threat of fire. This was known as the Fire Triangle. The same thing applies to crime. Three elements must be present in order for crime to be successful: desire, target and opportunity. These comprise the Crime Triangle. Fortunately, you have control of two out of the three elements. Let's take a look at each of the individual elements.

**The first element is desire.** That is the criminal's drive and motivation. There is nothing you can realistically do to curtail or eliminate that desire. Once he has the desire, he is looking for a target and an opportunity. This is where you come in.

**Can you guess who the potential target may be?** A target is anyone or any thing who appears to be an easy victim. A target appears not to be aware of their surroundings and appears easy to overtake or overpower. An easy target, by definition, will not put up any resistance. So what can you do? **You can "harden" the target** by becoming more aware of your surroundings. By being aware of your body language: eyes up, shoulders back, arms swinging, walking confidently and scanning the area; you send a signal to any would be predator that you are not easy prey. By installing the proper lighting, hardware, doors and windows you make your home less of a target.

**The next element is opportunity.** You control this by paying attention to your environment. Are you in a bad area of town? Are you walking in an unlit area? Are your car doors locked, do you leave your garage door open. Are you letting strangers in too close to ask questions - not defining personal boundaries? Limiting opportunities is about being aware of your environment.

**Opportunity makes the thief .** We can take control of our own personal safety by understanding how crime happens and by educating ourselves to become tougher targets. In doing so, we begin breaking the Crime Triangle.

## Elements of the Crime Triangle Strategy

**Opportunity** to commit the offence Increase the risk of apprehensions

**Ability** to commit the offence Increase the effort required to commit the offence

**Desire** to commit the offence Reduce the rewards available to the offender

## Operation Identification

This nationwide crime prevention program helps identify property if it should be stolen. Operation Identification is a program centered upon the belief that to prevent crime we must attempt to address the elements of the crime triangle. We attempt to make property less desirable to the criminal element by marking our valuables in such a way that they can be identified, increasing the likelihood that the thief will be caught with stolen goods. By doing this we hope that the criminal will choose to go elsewhere to commit his crimes and if he does take your belongings that if caught we can identify your property, successfully prosecute the thief, and return your property to you.

### Stages of Operation Identification

- Engrave Your Property
- Inventory Your Property

### Engrave Your Property

The Gibbsboro Police Department is proud to partner with Applied DNA Sciences to provide a new innovative way to deter theft and assist in returning stolen property to owners. The DNA kits can be purchased using the below link and any questions can be forwarded to the police department.

**To order a DNA kit:**

<https://www.adnasportal.com/dnanet/orderform>

**Info about the company:**

<http://www.adnas.com/company/about-applied-dna>

### Inventory Your Property

Make a list of all of your valuables. Make several copies and store them in two or more secure locations, such as a safe, locked drawer or cabinet. Include on your list a full description of the item including color, make, model, year of manufacture, and any other identifiers, including any engraving. Items to include on your list are personal walkmans, CD players, stereos, computers (desktop and laptop), printers and any other peripherals, telephones, televisions, radios, and any other belongings. Most electronic equipment has a serial number; anything that does not have any good identifier can be engraved. A consent form signed by a motor vehicle owner provides authorization for a law enforcement officer to stop the vehicle when it is being driven between the hours of 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m., provided that a decal is conspicuously affixed to the bottom left corner of the back window of the vehicle to provide notice of its enrolment in the C.A.T. program.

## **Vacation Check Forms**

Anytime a resident is going to be away for long periods of time, the police department has vacation check forms at the police department. This form can be filled out so that the police department can check properties while on patrol.

## **Nixle information**

Gibbsboro Borough has partnered with Nixle. By simply sending a text message with your zip code to 888777, you are instantly registered to receive text messages from local public safety agencies in your area. Want more control? Create a Nixle account at [www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com) and tailor exactly what information you receive and how you want to receive it – via text message, email, mobile application, or web browser.

Unlike social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook, Nixle employs a thorough screening process to verify that every agency joining the Nixle service is authentic. Other security measures such as 2-step login verification help to safeguard agency accounts beyond the level of protection provided by other online services. All of this is done to ensure that the messages you receive from Nixle are genuine and reliable.

Nixle is not only for emergencies. Stay up to date on other information affecting your community including traffic alerts, safety tips, and local crime information with your Nixle account. Messages always include a priority level so you can immediately judge their urgency upon receipt. Nixle also gives you the flexibility to direct messages based on priority so you can receive urgent information via text message and the rest via email.