



Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department North District

3120 East 30th Street, Indianapolis, IN 46218
(317) 327-6100

Starting and Maintaining a Crime Watch Group

"It is often the case, that communities needing Neighborhood Crime Watch the most are the ones that find it the hardest to get them organized or keep them active."

What is Neighborhood Crime Watch?

In essence, Neighborhood Crime Watch is a crime prevention program that stresses education, communication and the use of common sense. It teaches citizens how to help themselves by identifying and reporting suspicious activity in their neighborhoods. In addition, it provides citizens with the opportunity to make their neighborhoods safer, reduce the fear of crime and improve the quality of life.

Neighborhood Watch groups typically focus on observation and awareness as means of preventing crime, while employing strategies that range from simply promoting social interaction and "watching out for each other" to actively collaborate with Law Enforcement.

Most neighborhood crime prevention groups are organized around a block or a neighborhood, and start with the assistance from a law enforcement agency. Volunteers from the community donate their time and are at the center of such programs.

All Neighborhood Crime Watch groups share the same fundamental ideas: Bringing community members together to reestablish control of their neighborhoods; promoting and increasing the community's quality of life; and reducing crime rates in the area.

There are some basic steps to help you and your neighbors organize and maintain an effective Neighborhood Crime Watch Program:

1. Your Neighborhood Crime Watch must keep updated member rosters, maintain 50%-member participation, and meet "formally" at least twice a year.
2. From the beginning stages of a Neighborhood Crime Watch effort, it is essential to promote neighborhood involvement and to identify common issues and nuisances in your area.

3. Building a partnership between Law Enforcement and residents is not always an easy hurdle to overcome, especially since residents not always understand or agree with what they think should be the response to crime or other issues in their communities. For a Neighborhood Crime Watch program to be successful, it is essential to identify the real needs of their community, promoting inclusive community building, and working as role models and advocates for the neighborhood's betterment and crime prevention efforts.
4. Effective Neighborhood Crime Watch programs contribute to find common ground between Law Enforcement and residents, encouraging to collectively determine and prioritize what problems should be addressed in each community, while working with the appropriate city agencies to find suitable and sustainable solutions for them.
5. Selecting and training an active body of volunteers directed by organized and motivated leaders is critical. Without motivation and organization, Crime Watch volunteers may be uninspired to participate out of frustration for the lack of direction, goals and accomplishments.
6. Often, after a Neighborhood Crime Watch has addressed its original issue, members tend to lose interest. It is important for leaders and group members to remain proactive. One way to accomplish this is to find new projects, so that there is always a feasible goal towards which the team is working. Projects may include: organizing community events for "community building" (garage sales, cookouts, block parties, etc.); neighborhood cleanings and/or painting over graffiti; landscape and restoring projects for common areas; building a neighborhood playground, a dog park, a little library or a community garden; or any other project of interest for the community and that would help bringing the neighbors together.

Success does not happen overnight...

Following these steps and keeping them in place might not be all you need to create a truly effective Neighborhood Crime Watch program.

As any other community-based initiative, Neighborhood Crime Watch requires patience, planning, participation and enthusiasm. Once a Neighborhood Crime Watch program deteriorates and neighbors have lost interest and cease their involvement, illegal and unwanted activities and nuisances will resume shortly after, negatively impacting the safety, quality of life and property value in those communities. This should be enough motivation to keep preventive measures and activities in place, staying active to achieve the community's common goals.

Gerardo Becerra

Crime Watch – Crime Prevention Specialist

Community Relations

Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department – North District

Gerardo.Becerra@indy.gov

Office: (317) 327-3781

www.indy.gov/activity/indy-crimewatch