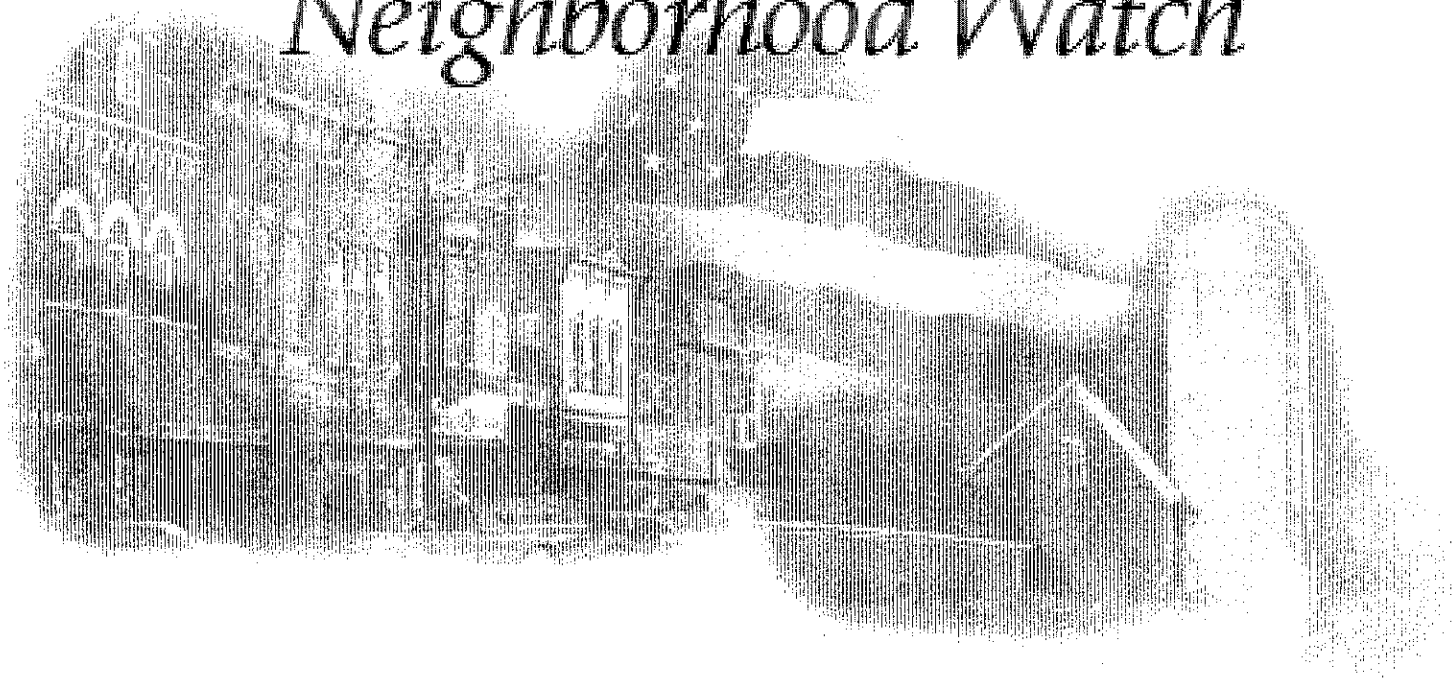
Neighborhood Watch



A manual for citizens and for law enforcement

National Sheriffs' Association

www.NSLCity.org

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This Neighborhood Watch manual is also available in a Spanish language version. Call the National Sheriffs' Association at 1-800-424-7827.

FOREWORD

Across the nation crime is of concern to citizens in cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas. Increasingly, citizens and law enforcement professionals realize that neither one can eradicate crime working separately. Neighbors and other concerned citizens, working cooperatively with law enforcement, can have a positive effect.

Home burglaries, in particular, can be minimized when community residents take steps to make their homes less attractive and vulnerable to burglars.

Burglary, the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft, is generally considered a crime against property. It has, however, a high potential for death or injury to the victim who comes into surprise contact with the intruder. Through the well recognized concept of NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, a community-based program supported by the National Sheriffs' Association since 1972, residents of thousands of communities across the nation have discovered that they can make a difference in preventing crime.

PART ONE

The Role of The Community in Neighborhood Watch

Ask anyone whose home has been burglarized ... the shock and helpless anger accompanying the discovery that an intruder has entered one's home will not easily be forgotten. The damage may be minimal or major, the losses slight or catastrophic. The incident may or may not have involved injury to a family member—yet one hard fact remains: *another* statistic has been added to the ever-growing list of burglarized homes. The burglar won again—and has no doubt vanished, leaving no real clue to lead to his arrest.

Is Your Neighborhood Ready to Resist Crime? Or Is It A Target For Burglars? It's Up To You!

Chances are good that a home burglarized today is located in a neighborhood where one vital prevention tool is missing: an active NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH group. This community-based organization of citizens working together with law enforcement has become the key to preventing burglary and crime nationwide.

The National Sheriffs' Association created the National NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program in 1972, with financial assistance from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, to unite law enforcement agencies, private organizations, and individual citizens in a massive effort to reduce residential crime. A work plan emerged for use by sheriffs, police, and citizens for putting together local neighborhood-based programs. Since its establishment, NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH has developed thousands of such local residential crime prevention programs in which individual citizens work to 1) make their own homes and families less inviting targets for crime, and 2) cooperate with law enforcement through block and neighborhood groups to control crime throughout the community.

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.]

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Areas Show Crime Drop

Throughout the United States, dramatic decreases in burglary and related offenses are reported by law enforcement professionals in communities with active NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH programs.

Statistics show that when a concerned citizenry does its part, the possibilities are endless...and the results positive. NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH is now the most successful anticrime initiative in the country and the most effective and least expensive tool for restoring the safe, pleasant environment we all want for our families! This is homeowners' insurance that works!

Taking Positive Steps

Victim responses to a home burglary generally follow a similar pattern: Initial fear and anger give way to an obsession with seeing the intruder caught and making sure the home is never targeted by criminals again. In the past, many frightened victims sat back and simply hoped their homes would be spared a repeat performance. They, as well as their neighbors, worried and wondered about what they could do to protect their property.

Since the establishment of NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, however, thousands of homeowners who want to take intelligently planned action to decrease crime statistics in their areas have discovered that they have a ready, willing and highly qualified partner in their local law enforcement agency. These homeowners now know that their agency would rather work *with* citizens to prevent crime than spend time and manpower investigating it after it occurs.

The Growing Need for NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

It is a fact of life that relationships in many of today's communities have become less personal than they were years ago. Families are more transient, children have more activities that take them and their parents away from home, and there are more families with both parents working. The once-familiar sight of families visiting with each other on front porches while keeping a watchful eye on children and activities in the neighborhood is a rarity in most communities today. This trend away from personal contact in the neighborhood and the decrease in time families spend at home are two of the essential ingredients that make communities ripe for crimes of opportunity, such as burglary.

Burglary—A Target for NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Burglary, *the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft,* is the crime that is targeted particularly by the National NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program. While it is one of the most

prevalent and difficult crimes facing law enforcement today, it is, at the same time, the one major crime that CAN be effectively resisted by each citizen taking POSITIVE ACTION at home.

Burglary accounts for nearly one-third of the index crimes in the United States. Although it is generally considered a crime against property, it has a high potential for death or injury to the victim who comes into surprise contact with the burglar.

Contrary to popular opinion, burglary is not a crime restricted to urban areas; it also occurs in suburban and rural areas at an alarming rate. There are exceptions to the rising tide of crime, however, and studies reveal that these are often thriving NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH communities, where dedicated, enthusiastic residents have been trained to notice suspicious activities and report them, not only to law enforcement officials, but also to *each other*. NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH is, after all, hardly a new idea; in fact, it is based on one of the oldest and simplest concepts known to man—neighbor helping neighbor. And when neighbors get together and cooperate with law enforcement, crime CAN be reduced. Numerous convicted burglars have admitted that they are simply not prepared to take the added risk of working in NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH-protected communities.

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 hazards;
- Training family members to keep valuables secure and to lock doors and windows when leaving home; it is a good practice to keep doors locked whether 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.
- Obtaining and studying informative materials from the National Sheriffs' Association, the National Crime Prevention Council, and local agencies;
- 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."

Starting a NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Group

You've heard about the benefits of NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH participation. You suspect—or know—that there is a crime problem in your area. How do you get a program started in your neighborhood?

FIRST...

Form a small planning committee of neighbors to discuss needs, the level of interest, and possible problems. Decide on a date and place for an initial NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH meeting.

NEXT...

Contact your local law enforcement agency. Request that a crime prevention officer come to a meeting of your group in the near future to discuss NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH and help assess your community's problems and needs. Inquire about crime statistics for your area, but bear in mind that crime is typically underreported. Ask that the officer bring to your meeting a list of local and national contacts that will assist you in organizing and keeping your program going along with samples of NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH signs, decals, and literature.

FINALLY...

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!

Planning for a Successful First Meeting

Schedule your kickoff meeting in a place convenient to the neighborhood, such as a private home, church, community building, school, or library.

Contact your police or sheriff's department 10 to 14 days in advance and inform officials of the date and place of the first meeting; verify that an officer will be able to attend. Seek a commitment from the police chief or sheriff to assign an officer to work with your group, and ask the chief or sheriff to address a letter to all potential NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH members expressing support. (See sample on page 8.)

Draw a large map of all the streets and households to be covered by your NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH organization. Start with a manageable number of homes at first; you can always add other areas.

Design a flyer or letter of invitation (see samples on page 9) and see that one is delivered to every home on your target list. Teenagers and Scouts in the neighborhood can play a valuable role by delivering announcements and information.

Follow up each invitation with a call or personal visit, reminding neighbors of the meeting time and place. Try to get each household to commit at least one adult member to the meeting so you can estimate potential attendance. All family members are welcome to join NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, as young people can add substantially to the success of the program. Senior citizen participation is also a plus; retired seniors are home and can observe the neighborhood when many other adults are at work.

Conducting the First Meeting

Arrive early at the first meeting to introduce the crime prevention officer and help everyone become acquainted.

Dear NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Participants,

The crime problem in our nation is both costly and demoralizing. Directly or indirectly, we are all affected by crime that has caused injury, financial loss and intimidation. These situations demonstrate vividly the need for community involvement and assistance in crime prevention, reporting and efforts in the

_____

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program.

This community-based crime prevention program is a simple and direct approach toward protecting our community from criminal attacks. The program involves the reduction of criminal opportunity through citizen participation in crime prevention measures, such as being alert and aware, reporting suspicious and criminal activity to the police, and initiating actions which reduce criminal opportunity.

In these times of reported apathy within our communities, it is encouraging to find the concern and involvement you and your neighbors display with your NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH efforts. The _____ Police/Sheriff's Department stands ready to assist and support you with this program.

Again, I welcome and appreciate your efforts toward making _____ a safer place to live and visit.

Gratefully,

_____

Chief of Police (Sheriff)

P.S. For assistance with your area's program, call

_____

Sample Notice

It Is Time To Stop! ! ! ! ! !

Burglary Break-Ins Vandalism

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Meeting

WHERE:	GOOCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL Calculus and Rosser
WHEN:	THURS. NOV. 5
TIME:	7:00 - 8:45 p.m. Must be out by 9:00 p.m.

An officer from the Police Department will show a film on security for our homes and discuss how we can protect our homes and our neighbors' homes.

It Takes All Of Us To Work Together
On This Project!
Please Try To Attend!

(Contact Name)_____

(Contact Number)_____

_____
Date

Dear Member:

There will be a meeting of your local NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH this month. The meeting will be held at the following location _____. The time of the meeting is_____ p.m., on_____. The County Crime Prevention Division is looking forward to seeing you at this meeting.

Sheriff or Chief of Police

Following the officer's presentation, ask for details concerning any area of the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH program that may not be clear, such as benefits of membership, training programs, availability of signs and materials, etc. Discuss the results of the neighborhood crime survey. Revealing information about crimes and suspicious incidents or activities in your area can often generate lively discussion and active commitment to the program.

Set clear, achievable goals for your program. Your crime prevention officer can offer insight into what your group can realistically expect to accomplish.

Start a list of names, addresses, phone numbers, and vehicle descriptions of those who decide to participate in the program. You may also want to include names and ages of their children, work and school schedules, and whether or not their homes have burglar alarms or timers on lights. While some of this information may seem somewhat personal to neighbors who have just met, it is essential that they make a commitment to the WATCH effort at this stage and agree to work together.

Choose high visibility NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH signs and decals to identify participating homes and streets (the cost can be divided among households). Your crime prevention officer may assist you in ordering materials, but he may want to postpone this option until a good percentage of the residents have agreed to participate and ample training has been conducted.

Discuss program coordination (see page 11); explain the responsibilities of the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Coordinator and the block captains. Proceed with nominations and election of persons (or designation of volunteers) to fill these positions.

Ask the officer to suggest topics and speakers for future meetings. Inquire about security inspections for participants' homes (many departments offer this service).

Determine time and place of next meeting. The members of the group should determine how often they will meet, but to keep the momentum going during the start-up phase, it is best to schedule monthly meetings. Some of the most successful WATCH programs require members' attendance during the first three to five meetings. These meetings are essential in organizing and training the participants, supplying them with crime prevention procedures, and reinforcing the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH concepts and commitment. These meetings are also instrumental in establishing a bond between group members.

Following Meeting

After the meeting, plan to distribute literature to residents in the community who were unable to attend. This may encourage them to be at the next meeting.

Program Coordination

The NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Coordinator

The Coordinator's job is crucial to the success of your program. This may be just the right job for a retiree or other individual who has extra time at home. This person's responsibilities may include:

- Expanding the program and maintaining a current list of participants and neighborhood residents, including names, addresses, home and work telephone numbers, and vehicle descriptions;
- Acting as liaison between WATCH members, law enforcement officers, civic groups, and block captains;
- Arranging neighborhood crime prevention training programs;
- Obtaining and distributing crime prevention materials, such as stickers and signs;
- Involving others to develop specific crime prevention projects;
- Encouraging participation in "Operation Identification," a nationwide program in which personal property is marked indelibly with a unique identifying number to permit positive identification if valuables are lost or stolen.

The Block Captain

Block captains should be designated for every 10–15 houses, and they should be directly involved with their immediate neighbors. The block captain's responsibilities may include:

- Acting as liaison between block residents and the Coordinator;

- Establishing a "telephone chain" by compiling and distributing a current list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of block participants;
- Visiting and inviting new residents to join NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH; notifying them of meetings and training sessions;
- Establishing the "Operation Identification" program;
- Contacting each neighbor as often as possible to discuss possible crime problems, needs for assistance, and suggestions for program improvement.

Developing Citizen Awareness Through Crime Prevention Programs

Monthly meetings of your NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH group should be utilized for programs to develop citizen awareness and proper response to suspected or actual criminal activity. Speakers from law enforcement as well as from a wide range of community organizations are valuable resources for this training.

Appropriate program topics include the following:*

- Recognizing suspicious activity;
- Describing and reporting events, vehicles and persons;
- Home security inspections;
- Home security measures;
- Telephone security;
- Confrontations with intruders.

Recognizing Suspicious Activity

BE ALERT. Anything that seems slightly "out of place" or is occurring at an unusual time of day could be criminal activity. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPREHEND A PERSON COMMITTING A CRIME OR TO INVESTIGATE A SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY. Call the police or sheriff's department immediately, and do not worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove to be unfounded. Law enforcement officers would rather investigate than be called when it is too late.

The following incidents MAY indicate possible criminal activity

*See pages 22-33 for additional program ideas and training topics.

and should be reported:

- Continuous repair operations at a nonbusiness location (stolen property being altered);
- Open or broken doors and windows at a closed business or unoccupied residence (burglary or vandalism);
- Unusual noises, such as gunshots, screaming, or dogs barking continuously (burglary, assault, or rape);
- Sound of breaking glass (burglary or vandalism);
- A person exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms (person may be injured, under the influence of drugs, or otherwise needing medical attention).

Time and accuracy are critical in reporting crime or suspicious events. Use your law enforcement agency's emergency number to report life-threatening incidents or a crime in progress, and use the non-emergency number for crimes that have already occurred. Your call could save a life, prevent an injury, or stop a crime. The information you provide will be kept confidential. You do not need to give your name, although this is often helpful.

Suspicious Persons

Obviously, not every stranger who comes into a neighborhood is a criminal. Legitimate door-to-door sales and repair people appear in residential areas frequently. Occasionally, however, criminals disguise themselves as these workers; therefore, it is important to be alert to the activities of all nonresidents. Law enforcement officials *should* be called to investigate persons in the following circumstances, who may be suspects in the crimes indicated:

- Going door to door in a residential area, especially if one or more goes to rear of residence or loiters in front of an unoccupied house or closed business (burglary);
- Forcing entrance or entering an unoccupied house (burglary, theft, or trespassing);
- Running, especially if carrying something of value or carrying unwrapped property at an unusual hour (fleeing the scene of a crime);
- Heavy traffic to and from a residence, particularly if it occurs on a daily basis (drug dealing, vice or fence operation);
- Screaming (rape or assault);

- Loitering around or peering into cars, especially in parking lots or on streets (car theft);
- Loitering around schools, parks or secluded areas (sex offender);
- Offering items for sale at a very low price (trying to sell stolen property);
- Loitering or driving through a neighborhood several times or appearing as delivery person with a wrong address (burglary).

Suspicious Vehicles

Vehicles in the following situations MAY be involved in crimes and should be reported to authorities:

- Slow moving, without lights, following aimless course in any location, including residential streets, schools, and playgrounds (burglar, drug pusher, or sex offender);
- Parked or occupied, containing one or more persons, especially at an unusual hour (lookouts for a burglary or robbery);
- Parked by a business or unoccupied residence, being loaded with valuables (burglary or theft);
- Abandoned in your neighborhood (stolen car);
- Containing weapons (criminal activity);
- Someone, especially a female or juvenile, being forced into a vehicle (kidnapping, assault, or attempted rape);
- Business transactions taking place in it, especially around schools or parks (sale of stolen items or drugs);
- Someone attempting to forcibly enter it, especially in a parking lot (theft of car or its contents);
- Persons detaching mechanical parts or accessories from it (theft or vandalism);
- Objects being thrown from it (disposing of contraband).

Describing and Reporting of Events, Vehicles and Persons

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.

Describing Events

When describing events, write down:

- *What* happened;
- *When* it happened;
- *Where* it occurred (note the nearest cross street, home address, or landmark in relationship to the event);
- *Whether injuries* are involved (Be prepared to report visible or suspected personal injury. Be as specific as possible—this could save a life!);
- *Whether weapons* are involved (this information, whether observed or suspected, is vital to responding officers).

Describing Vehicles

When describing vehicles, write down:

- Vehicle license number and state, make and type of vehicle, color, and approximate age;
- Special designs or unusual features, such as vinyl top, mag wheels, body damage, pinstripes, etc.;
- Direction of travel.

Describing Persons

In preparing descriptions of persons, it is important to write down the following:

- Sex;
- Race;
- Age;
- Height (estimated from eye contact level measured against your height);
- Weight;
- Hair (color and length);
- Hat;
- Facial Hair (beard/mustache);
- Shirt/tie;
- Coat/jacket;

- Trousers;
- Shoes;
- Any peculiar or distinguishable mannerisms, physical disabilities, disfigurations, scars or tattoos;
- Voice characteristics;
- Direction of movement.

Home Security Inspections

One of the most effective ways to educate NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH participants to protect their property is to arrange for detailed security inspections of their homes. Your Crime Prevention Officer can assist you in the effort and can provide WATCH members with home security inspection checklists so that preliminary surveys can be conducted by homeowners or block captains.

Volunteer inspectors should be carefully screened before being admitted to the program; they should receive intensive training and be required to make a detailed report on each inspection. It might be wise to have homeowners sign a disclaimer relative to these inspections.

Home Security Measures

You must be aware of the potential risk of crime in your home in order to prevent it. First...Remember that the key factor in most crimes is OPPORTUNITY. IF THEY CAN'T GET AT IT, THEY CAN'T TAKE IT! Then...follow a regular plan of home security to deter the potential burglar or other intruder.

- Use a timer or photo electric cell that automatically turns a living room light on at dusk, particularly if you are going to be away at that time;
- Leave a radio on with the volume turned low when leaving home, even for short periods;
- Always close and lock garage doors;
- Secure automatic garage door transmitter in glove compartment of your car;
- Secure all obvious (and not so obvious) points of entry to your home. Pretend you are the burglar...stand outside your home and plan how you would get in; then install secure locks on all doors and windows;

- Lock up all ladders, ropes, or tools that could help a burglar gain entry;
- Keep all shrubbery trimmed near your doors and windows—don't provide concealment or climbing platforms for the burglar;
- Brightly illuminate all entrances, preferably with vandal-proof fixtures;
- Keep your grass cut, your leaves raked, etc., to indicate a well cared for and occupied home;
- Empty your mailbox or arrange to have it emptied as soon as mail is delivered;
- Install new locks when moving into an apartment or previously owned home;
- Keep extra keys out of sight and in a safe place; never hide a key outside—most hiding places are obvious to burglars;
- Avoid displaying valuable items near windows with open drapes or shades;
- Never leave a note on the door explaining why you are not at home;
- Never leave doors or windows unlocked when leaving home;
- Display only your last name on your nameplate or mailbox;
- Start a "buddy system" with your neighbors in order to watch each other's homes; watch for "movers" or "repair people" at a house where no one is home.

When Leaving Home for Several Days

- Don't cancel your paper or mail deliveries; ask that your neighbor pick them up every day;
- Leave a key with a friend or neighbor; ask that the house be checked periodically;
- Have the drapes periodically opened and closed; and have different lights turned on and off so the house appears occupied;
- Store all your valuables;
- Tell police when you are leaving and when you plan to return; they will check on your house periodically;
- Consider asking friends or relatives to live in your home while you are away;
- Leave a car in the driveway, or ask neighbors to park in it;
- Ask your neighbor to put some trash in your trash cans.

Despite precautions, if intruders are determined to enter and burglarize your home, they can probably do so. However, burglars usually seek the easiest target—and you can take steps to make your house less vulnerable.

Telephone Security

Daily Telephone Security

- Never give personal information (name, age, address, etc.) to a stranger on the telephone;
- Never let a stranger on the telephone know when you will or will not be home;
- Never let a stranger on the telephone know you are home alone; instruct babysitters never to tell anyone who calls that they are home alone with children;
- Teach children old enough to be left alone never to tell a stranger who telephones that parents are gone. Teach them to say, "My mom can't come to the phone now. May I take a message?"
- Credit card/Social Security #, etc. Do not give out a credit card or social security number to someone whom you do not know or whom *you* did not call.

When Planning a Trip

- Consider having your telephone "put on vacation." (Notify the telephone company approximately two weeks before your trip, and arrangements will be made for an operator or a recording to state that your telephone is temporarily out of order each time it rings);
- Use "call forwarding" if available in your area. (Call forwarding can give callers the impression that residents are home when they are actually away, by transferring your incoming calls to another telephone number. Your local phone company can provide you with further information.)

Confrontations with Intruders

Develop the habit of surveying your home as you approach it. If you note evidence that someone has broken in, DO NOT ENTER. Go to the nearest telephone and call the police or sheriff's department. Should you confront a burglar, the very first rule is: GET

OUT OF HIS WAY!! Never get between a burglar and the exit, and never try to stop him. It may cost you your life!

If you are in your home and someone is prowling outside, make it appear that several people are at home. For example, call to someone, "Dan, there's something outside." Call the police; and if it is dark, turn on the lights. If an intruder has already broken in, retreat and put other doors between the two of you. It is a good idea to have a deadbolt on an interior door. If you cannot get out, try to signal a neighbor by throwing something through a window; just the noise may frighten a burglar away.

If someone should enter your bedroom while you are in bed, pretend that you are asleep as long as he does not come near you.

If the intruder is armed, do what he says, and see that children do so as well. Remain calm—intruders generally want your property rather than your life.

Memorize a description of the intruder and write it down immediately after he has left; then call the police or your sheriff's department. Don't depend on memory.

PART TWO

The Role of Law Enforcement in Neighborhood Watch

As the sheriff or police chief, you are the law enforcement leader in your community, and the impetus and pacesetter for NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH in your jurisdiction. Whether your program is new or well established, it requires your continuous and enthusiastic support.

Without your sincere involvement, needed programs are not likely to get off the ground; and interest in existing programs will wane. EVERYONE BENEFITS WHEN LAW ENFORCEMENT MAINTAINS A HIGH LEVEL OF INTEREST IN NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH. Ninety-five percent of the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH groups in the United States are currently receiving assistance from law enforcement agencies.

Responsibilities of the Sheriff and Police Chief

Because NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH programs operate with volunteers and shoestring budgets or no budgets at all, they can benefit greatly from your agency's help. Be prepared to commit equipment, training, operating space, speakers, liaison officers,

and crime statistic information, as well as encouragement and guidance, to the program in your jurisdiction. Most successful NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH groups engage in a wide range of activities beyond passive surveillance. By working with them, your department and the community will share in the rewards. You will be truly impressed with the initiative and responsibility citizens will assume for "hardening" their neighborhoods against crime if you will encourage them and work with them.

Communities reporting decreasing crime after starting NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH typically praise their leaders with comments like, "Our Sheriff (or Chief) got our program going and has stuck with it since. It's the best thing we've had happen here in a long, long time!"

Establishing New NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Groups

In establishing and supporting NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, you must first identify the organizational section, unit, and officer(s) who will have overall responsibility for the groups in your jurisdiction. Select only those officers or deputies who are willing to commit themselves totally to act as liaison with WATCH Coordinators. Outgoing personalities and impeccable reputations are desirable traits for those officers. More importantly, however, THEY MUST HAVE AN UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO CRIME PREVENTION.

If you are the initiator of NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH in your area, be prepared to lend manpower and logistical support to the effort. You may want to check available crime reports and demographic information to determine boundaries for potential WATCH groups. In most cases, large rural areas can be adequately covered with relatively few WATCH members.

Your staff should not attempt to force NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH programs upon a neighborhood; rather, with the help of civic, professional, social, and senior citizens' groups, they should identify and motivate residents who can serve as organizers and coordinators in each area. The NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Project Officer must then be prepared to do a selling job—to describe the crime problem in depth and explain why the assistance of these particular leaders is essential to an effective, responsive program. This must be a joint effort, shared by citizens and law enforcement.

Responsibilities of Coordinators and Liaison Officers

The responsibility for stimulating neighborhood residents to action should rest jointly with the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program Coordinator and the officer or deputy assigned.

Their duties should include: organizing neighborhood meetings, promoting the program, and arranging for residential inspections and property marking sessions. If practical, neighborhood meetings can take place in private homes, where the props essential to the discussion of burglary and target hardening are available. Also, the host's gesture of hospitality can aid in acquainting neighbors and getting them to agree to keep an eye on one another's property and on the neighborhood in general.

If a "block watch" or "block parent" program already exists, it can be integrated with the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program; in fact, existing block captains or block parents would make good NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program Coordinators.

It is important for your agency to set realistic and achievable goals for programs in your jurisdiction. Identify ways to build and strengthen a strong base of community support for various WATCH groups. In particular, your department should make every possible use of organizations existing in the community to incorporate their efforts toward your common goals. These community groups can serve as a source of funds, manpower, and most importantly, a platform to spread the word. The sheriff or chief of police should extend a written invitation to the groups' leaders to meet to discuss the crime prevention program, its objectives, and manner of implementation. Among the organizations that may be of assistance are:

- Radio Emergency Associated Communications Team (REACT)
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- The General Federation of Women's Clubs
- Kiwanis International
- American Farm Bureau Federation
- Rotary International
- Association of General Contractors
- Bar Associations
- P.T.A.
- YMCA, YWCA
- Urban League

- Neighborhood Improvement Leagues
- Realtors' Associations
- Boy Scouts—Explorers
- Optimist Clubs
- R.S.V.P. and other Senior Citizens Organizations

Getting NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH underway leads to other positive activities. The enthusiasm for crime prevention is contagious, and participants often seek additional ways to become involved. For example, a large percentage of current WATCH participants are also involved in Operation Identification. The majority request home security surveys from their police or sheriff's department. As the law enforcement partner in your NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH group, you should ensure that burglary and vandalism reports written by the department indicate whether a home security inspection had been conducted of the victim's property and what corrective actions the owner or resident had taken. Crime prevention and victim assistance personnel should follow up on all burglaries to encourage the victim to take steps to reduce his vulnerability to future incidents.

Communication Between Law Enforcement and NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Communication with WATCH members is crucial to the success of the program. More than half of the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH groups surveyed distribute newsletters for members. You can help with an ongoing system of getting the word to members on crime alerts, crime trends and patterns, or other information on criminal activity or safety that affects those in your jurisdiction.

Setting Up Programs and Goals

Successful NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH groups do more than just serve as nosy neighbors who keep their eyes open and report possible problems. Groups surveyed indicate:

- 80 percent participate in Operation Identification;
- 68 percent sponsor home security surveys;

- 38 percent work on environmental/beautification problems;
- 27 percent coordinate Block Parenting programs;
- 19 percent engage in some form of victim assistance.

Experimenting with different crime prevention and community service methods is one way to keep your NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH program alive. Having realistic and achievable goals also stimulates participation.

Some projects, ideas or program topics you may want to consider for your WATCH Group follow:

Citizen Patrols

Foot or vehicle patrol may be effective for your group. Two or more individuals, often from the same family, patrol during designated tours of duty and may detect suspicious activity not noticed by stationary observers. Lost children, stranded motorists, stray dogs, damaged street signs or traffic signals, wandering cattle, and automobile accidents are often discovered by citizen patrols.

Patrol members should be trained by law enforcement. It should be emphasized to members that they do not possess police powers and they shall not carry weapons or pursue vehicles. They should also be cautioned to alert police or deputies when encountering strange activity. MEMBERS SHOULD NEVER CONFRONT SUSPICIOUS PERSONS WHO COULD BE ARMED AND DANGEROUS.

As a rule, patrol groups should work in shifts, "sweeping" through the neighborhood periodically. In rural communities, it may be wise to check with neighboring landowners and determine the extent of surveillance they desire; some prefer to have their property observed from a distance, while others welcome patrollers right up to their front doors.

Groups may also want to intensify patrol efforts during certain holiday periods (Halloween, Independence Day) or supplement the sheriff or police patrol during its change of the watch.

Patrol members should be properly equipped for their duties. For example, flashlights or searchlights are necessary for night patrols. Many mobile patrols use cell phones or two-way radios to contact a citizen-manned base station, which in turn contacts law enforcement officials when necessary.

Equipment can be rotated among members going on patrol. WATCH members unable to participate in active patrol can be

asked to help in manning base stations for two-way radios or with sharing cost of gasoline and other expenses. (Some service station managers donate gasoline for these citizen patrols.)

Patrol Procedures

1. The patrol should be well defined.
2. Only residents of the defined community, at least 18 years old, should participate in the patrol.
3. Patrol members must have participated in a training session.
4. A patrol team should consist of two people: a driver and an observer in the patrol vehicle or two neighbors walking together. A vehicle may be marked with a removable sign.
5. The purpose of community patrol is to observe and report only. Patrol members should not leave their vehicle or become involved with a suspect.
6. Patrol members do not possess police powers. Each member is liable as an individual for civil and criminal charges should he exceed his authority.
7. Patrol members should not challenge anyone. The patrol's visual presence should be a deterrent to most criminal activity. If a suspicious situation continues, patrol members should call law enforcement professionals and request assistance.
8. Patrol members should not pursue vehicles (except briefly) to get the license number. They should not attempt to enforce traffic laws.
9. Patrol members should patrol as designated, in a random fashion, and at varied times rather than in an observable pattern.
10. Patrol members may not drink alcoholic beverages while on patrol nor report for patrol if they have been drinking.
11. Patrol members do not carry weapons.
12. Any members violating patrol procedures may be banned from participation in the community patrol.
13. Patrol members should take notes of suspicious situations on log sheets. The notes may become evidence if a situation becomes a criminal matter. A copy of the notes could be turned over to the Block Captain and the original kept by the patrol member. (The notes may be needed later for the patrol member to refresh his memory.)

Victim Assistance Programs

If your agency hasn't already done so, give serious consideration to initiating a victim assistance program. Many citizens suffer serious mental anguish after being victimized by crime and are in need of comfort and help. Many victims (especially women and the elderly) are intimidated by the perpetrator. In some areas, the entire community is victimized.

Your agency may not be able to provide all the direct services to victims, but it can act as a referral source to professional agencies in the community. Your agency is especially suited to inform victims of what may be required of them if the case is prosecuted.

Your NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH group is also a logical resource for rendering assistance to neighbors who are victims of crime. Your agency is responsible for training and coordinating your WATCH program. Through these training programs, citizens can learn the following methods for providing aid to the victim:

- BE THERE to encourage, support, comfort, care for, and reassure the victim.
- Avoid being judgmental. If the victim shows signs of guilt, let him know that the *criminal* is at fault.
- Take time to listen and let the victim talk. Ventilation is healthy.
- Be informed and offer the necessary support for the victim to deal with coming events in the investigation and prosecution process. Arrange for an informed individual to discuss the procedures and requirements of the criminal justice system with the victim.
- Have telephone contact persons available. Each NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH group can provide referrals for the victim to help in dealing with the trauma associated with being victimized as well as to help them through criminal justice proceedings.
- Help provide for the daily needs of the victim—food, repairs, transportation, babysitting, care of pets, running errands, etc.
- Be with the victim during key stages of criminal justice proceedings, such as the investigation, visits to the prosecutor, and the court.

Operation Identification (O.I.)

Operation Identification is the name given to a nationwide program of marking personal property indelibly with a unique identify-

ing number to permit positive identification if the items are lost or stolen. Numbers can be engraved onto metal objects or marked with indelible markers on other materials. The numbers can then be entered on a nationwide computer.

Citizens who mark their property have a greater chance of recovering it, as this aids the law enforcement agency in identifying the valuables. Operation I.D. also deters the burglar by making it more difficult to dispose of stolen goods and increases his chances of discovery and conviction.

SAFEHOUSES for children

A safe location such as the McGruff House or Block House is identified by bright stickers on windows and doors which indicate that the occupants are block parents willing to help a frightened or pursued child if needed.

Ideally, the adults participating in a block house program are either retired or otherwise not employed out of the home and available for assistance during the day. After your agency has conducted a background check on juvenile and adults in the home, there is a clear understanding about the types of assistance a block parent should and should not attempt to render to a child in distress.

Signs and stickers should be displayed only when the block parent is in the house and within hearing distance of the doorbell. Officers should have a list of authorized safe houses and check neighborhoods periodically to ensure that only authorized homes display the signs.

TRIAD

In an increasing number of communities, older residents and law enforcement participate in Triad, a cooperative concept. Working together, the police department(s), sheriff's office, and senior leaders devise strategies to reduce crimes against the elderly—and to deal with the sometimes exaggerated fear of crime which affects some elderly persons. Triads also sponsor reassurance efforts for lonely or isolated seniors.

As part of an active Triad, seniors may be encouraged to participate more actively in NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH. Triad may bring forth capable leaders and more sets of eyes and ears to observe suspicious activities in a community.

Youth Escort Service

A Youth Escort Service is one way young persons can assist an older person who needs assistance or companionship for any reason. Through this service, organized by NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, a young person accompanies an elderly person on regularly scheduled trips or in response to a request that might come into a central escort service. It is an appropriate service not only in the typical residential community but also in rural areas and in housing developments for the elderly.

A Youth Escort Service is not a security or bodyguard service, but a program to alleviate and counteract fear among elderly persons. It is a program of companionship and of service to those who need special kinds of assistance when they move about. FEAR of crime is a reality—often far beyond the reality of the danger. Combatting this fear is a commendable effort and a genuine service.

National Night Out

The National Association of Town Watch sponsors an annual event, National Night Out, on the first Tuesday of each August. Local Watch groups and other crime prevention organizations hold block parties, cookouts, parades and rallies to promote involvement in crime and drug prevention activities.

Additional Security Lighting

In rural areas, where no street lights exist, electric companies have demonstrated their willingness to support security lighting programs by providing discounts on a group basis for families who wish to install such lighting. Contact your rural electrical cooperative for further information.

Crime Stoppers

This highly successful nationwide program is based on the simple principle that for every crime committed, someone other than the offender has information that could solve the crime. CRIME STOPPERS serves to overcome victims' fear of involvement or retaliation by offering anonymity, and it reduces apathy by offering rewards to those who provide useful information.

To preserve anonymity, callers reporting crimes are not asked to give their names, but are assigned code numbers from a chronological log sheet. This number is used in all future communications.

Your WATCH group can be instrumental in getting such a program off the ground in your area, or can offer assistance to an existing CRIME STOPPERS program by eliciting public, judicial and media support.

Seasonal Crime Prevention Tips

Crime tips are yet another way your group can provide timely information to neighbors in regard to holidays, seasonal changes, or special events. This program is not an expensive one and can be accomplished by simply noting the tips on a postcard and mailing or distributing them throughout the community, or providing them as Public Service Announcements to local radio and TV stations.

Telephone Trees

Telephone trees can help expedite emergency information among your neighbors. Neighborhoods can be divided into small, workable areas using streets or natural boundaries. Each group prepares a chart (which is continuously updated) that includes the names and phone numbers of all members. A Block Captain or other person is designated to be contacted by the police or sheriff's department. Each individual listed on the tree knows whom he is to contact should emergency or other important information need to be disseminated in a hurry.

Radio Emergency Associated Communications Teams

Owners of two way radios have been shown to be a valuable adjunct to many WATCH groups. REACT team members may monitor CB channel 9, amateur, GMRS or other radio frequencies as a public service and pass reports by telephone from their home or office to police, highway patrol, fire, auto club and other agencies.

Beautification Projects

Your group can organize an effort to remove graffiti, trash, abandoned autos, and other unsightly nuisances from your neighborhood community. Community pride can be enhanced even in impoverished areas by working to make the area more attractive and livable. Research has indicated that improvements of this type can have measurable effects on reducing actual crime as well as the fear of crime among community members.

Fire Prevention Programs

These and other safety-related programs can be excellent additions to your NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH meetings. Many fire prevention officers are willing to address WATCH groups on such topics as Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), disaster preparedness, and fire safety.

Ident-A-Youth

Thousands of children are reported missing each year. Fingerprinting children can hasten the identification of missing children, and this is being done by law enforcement departments across the country at no cost to parents. WATCH parents can participate in this effort and encourage others to do so.

Fundraising

This may not be essential for your group. More than half of the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH programs surveyed reported having no funding source at the inception. Of those needing funding, however, many are sponsoring successful bake sales, pot luck dinners, ice cream socials, raffles, yard sales, and community festivals.

Installation of Security Devices

Using the contributed services of handymen in your WATCH groups is a great way to help your neighbors install locks, window pins and bars, peepholes, and other security devices. Such assistance saves the cost of the actual installation, thereby inducing

more citizens to take these important measures. Some NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH groups arrange to purchase locks and other security devices in quantity at a discount.

Some jurisdictions provide mobile crews to install security devices at minimal cost to residents. In addition, some residents, including senior citizens, handicapped persons, and burglary victims are among those who may be offered these services free.

Building Security Into New Homes

Good locks, outdoor lighting, and alarm systems can be installed during construction of houses, townhouses, and apartments for much less than it will cost a homeowner to add them later. Your agency can work with county and municipal planning and building code enforcement officials to develop standards for security devices for new, single family, and multiple family residences. If your community will not include requirements for adequate locks and lighting in its building code, it is important to work with builders, realtors, and consumer protection groups to persuade builders to consider security when they construct dwellings.

Try to get real estate agents to stress the good security features of homes and apartments. Realtors can have considerable influence on builders and apartment building owners.

Your agency can also work with your local locksmiths to stress the importance of security hardware. It is in their best interest—as well as that of law enforcement and the homeowner—to see that good hardware is used.

House Numbering Project

Nothing is more frustrating to a responding police officer than to arrive at a location and not be able to find the exact house because no house numbers can be seen. Every house number should be uniform as to the size and location and should be visible from the street at night. Start a project that will ensure that house numbers are present, uniform, and conspicuous.

"Rent-A-Teen"

Whenever possible, the young adults of your neighborhood

should be actively involved in your WATCH program. Through "Rent-A-Teen," they perform odd jobs (wash windows, cut grass, wax cars, paint, etc.) for a fee. The money collected could be used for special youth projects, such as field trips or other worthwhile neighborhood projects.

Auto Bumper Decal

This is a program to identify vehicles belonging to residents within a WATCH neighborhood. The basic purpose of the bumper decal system is to alert police patrol and concerned community members about vehicles which do not belong in the WATCH area, allowing appropriate action to be taken when necessary.

Warmlines

Warmlines can be set up by group members willing to spend time talking to children who become lonely after returning from school to empty homes. The Warmlines serves as a valuable link between these "latchkey" children and a helping adult should an emergency arise.

House Sitting

Your agency should urge members of church groups, senior citizen clubs, and social clubs to establish routine procedures for "housesitting" when their members are attending funeral services, weddings, or when they are temporarily confined in a hospital or convalescent center. People are especially vulnerable to burglaries at these times and are least able emotionally and financially to withstand shock and loss.

Natural Observers

Natural observers, such as senior citizens, teenagers, utility truck drivers, bus drivers, mailmen, or joggers should be recruited into WATCH programs. These individuals are often moving about neighborhoods during daylight hours when most burglaries occur and are a valuable addition to crime prevention efforts.

Organizational Aids

The success of any program relies on solid organizational structure, sound programming, and accurate records, as well as dedicated participants. With this in mind, you will need to develop forms to assist both your department and the WATCH group keep track of program implementation and activities. Some of those you may consider are as follows:

Organizational Structure Form

This form provides the Crime Prevention Unit with the names, addresses and phone numbers of the liaison people in the neighborhood (Block Captains, Committee, and Coordinator). It is the responsibility of the Neighborhood Coordinator to obtain and provide this needed information.

Activity/Correspondence Record Form

This form is a record of all contacts between the neighborhood and the Crime Prevention Unit as well as a record of activity in the NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH area. The responsibility for updating this file lies with the Neighborhood Coordinator and the Crime Prevention Unit. It is the responsibility of the Neighborhood Coordinator to advise the Unit concerning neighborhood activities such as meetings, Operation Identification, and sign-up progress, crime problems, etc. The contact officer is responsible for making all such notations on the form.

Participation Form

Signatures on this form will be used to determine the percentage of neighborhood participation in the program. This same form can be used to track Operation Identification progress by making appropriate notations next to participants' names. Before a neighborhood is allowed to display NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH signs, 70 percent participation in these two activities (sign-up and Operation

Identification) is recommended. It is the responsibility of the Neighborhood Coordinator to provide the Crime Prevention Unit with this listing of participants.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH is a community based program which requires a commitment on the part of each participant. The Block Captain has the responsibility of explaining the program and the participants' duties prior to requesting their signatures and commitments.

Map of the Area

It is the responsibility of the Block Captain, if there is no Planning Committee, to provide the Neighborhood Coordinator with a map showing the street(s) for which the Block Captain is responsible. This map should show each dwelling, listing the name, address and telephone numbers of its residents. The NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH participants' homes should be clearly marked. Once the Neighborhood Coordinator has all the maps from the Block Captains, it is the Coordinator's responsibility to provide a master copy to the Crime Prevention Unit.

Crime Statistics

Local crime statistics are provided by the agency's Crime Analysis Unit and shared with citizens as appropriate by the Crime Prevention Unit. In many law enforcement agencies, trained volunteers assist in compiling and analyzing statistics to indicate when and where various types of crimes are being committed.

Neighborhood Newsletters

If the neighborhood has a newsletter, a copy of each edition should be forwarded to the Crime Prevention Unit to be filed in the neighborhood's folder.

Newspaper Articles

Crime prevention or related articles that appear in the local newspapers regarding the neighborhood should be sent to the Crime Prevention Unit for filing.

NOTES

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, SOMETIMES CALLED CRIME WATCH, BLOCK WATCH OR COMMUNITY WATCH, IS A SIMPLE PROGRAM WHICH CAN HAVE FAR-REACHING RESULTS.

STARTING A NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM IS NOT DIFFICULT OR COMPLICATED. INTERESTED CITIZENS CAN TAKE THE FIRST STEP—OR LAW ENFORCEMENT PROFESSIONALS MAY TAKE THE LEAD.

MAINTAINING AN ACTIVE NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM MAY MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SAFE COMMUNITY AND ONE AFFECTED BY BURGLARY AND/OR VANDALISM.

LEARN HOW TO GET INVOLVED—AND PLAY A ROLE IN A SAFER AMERICA.