

Who is Watching Your Neighborhood

With the frequent number of burglaries in and around Austin, I have been asked by a number of citizens how they can help. We currently work with through the local media, neighborhood and homeowner associations, safety fairs, and other crime reducing initiatives to educate and get the word out to everyone on ways reduce the opportunity of them becoming victims of property crimes. This is a continuing effort as many victims feel that it won't happen to them and they take a chance. Many victims are aware of burglaries in their area or, in the instance of vehicle burglaries, are aware of the possibility of being a victim in the area where they are parking – such as a store, mall, hike and bike trail – anywhere. Yet, many of these crimes can be prevented. Lock, Take, and Hide is general rule to help reduce opportunity!

But what else can you do? Many associations have a neighborhood watch program, but how active and effective is their program. The success of your program may rely on you!

What is Neighborhood Watch?

Crime or the fear of crime provides the impetus for residents to become better informed on how to protect themselves and their property. Getting back to the old adage of being our “brother’s keepers”, means neighbors watching out for other neighbors. Neighbors are asked to be the eyes and ears in helping the police in apprehending criminals. Crime Watch is not designed to substitute for police protection. Rather it is an extension or supplement in assisting the police in making neighborhoods safer for all residents. Neighborhood Watch operates under two principles. When neighbors get to know and watch out for each other, they watch out for each other's property as though it was their own. Second, Neighborhood Watch helps to create an identity within the neighborhood, which in turn fosters sense of pride, and belonging for the participants. The participants make their neighborhood a safer place to live by adopting a more observant and active attitude and, as a result, become more aware of strange cars, persons, or circumstances. This will not take a lot of time and soon will develop into a daily habit of becoming more aware of what is going on in the neighborhood.

As a community, people generate many good ideas on how to protect their neighborhood from crime, but it takes active participation. A reduction in crime and higher quality of life can be accomplished by combining citizen involvement with the available law enforcement resources. More resources can help reduce crime, but a joint effort will be more effective almost every time.

Some associations are coordinating their recreational walks with looking out for suspicious activity and reporting that activity to the police. This is a very good start and with the age of cell phones, reporting suspicious activity to the police can be done from almost anywhere. You can help by being familiar and aware of your surroundings and when you observe something that looks suspicious – report it. Follow these tips what to do if you see suspicious activity. Do it for your neighbor – do it for your community.

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SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORTING AND PURPOSE OF REPORTING

The purpose for reporting suspicious activity to the police is to stop the criminal activity, increase police presence in your neighborhood and give a true perspective of crime. Making a report will enhance the possibility of getting your property returned. Keep police emergency numbers close by when reporting suspicious activity or an emergency. Anything that seems slightly “out of place” or does not look right could be criminal activity.

CALL THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY ABOUT ALL SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY.

Do not worry about “bothering” the police or being embarrassed if your suspicions prove to be unfounded. Think ahead about what could happen if you don’t act. Give the police or the telephone clerk:

- The reason for the call.
- The location of the activity.
- The description of the suspect and any vehicle involved.
- If the crime is in progress, give the circumstances and possible crime being committed.

WHEN IN DOUBT, CALL IT IN

Under no circumstances should you attempt to apprehend a person committing a crime or try to investigate suspicious activity. The police want your information – not your action.

The police department would rather investigate than be called when it is too late. Your call could save a life, prevent an injury or stop a criminal act. **BE ALERT.** Not every stranger who comes into your neighborhood is a criminal, by any means.

There are many door-to-door salesmen, repairmen, and servicemen moving around our neighborhood all the time. But criminals do take advantage of this by pretending to be legitimate workmen.

“What is Neighborhood Watch” and “Suspicious Activity Reporting and Purpose of Reporting” information was obtained from the Austin Police Department “Forming a Neighborhood Watch Program” manual

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/police/downloads/neighborhoodwatchmanual.pdf>