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Dear Friends,

It's no secret that technology has changed the way we socialize in America. When I was a kid, neighborhoods teemed with activity and we knew the folks who lived around us by name. We were part of each other's lives and we knew right away when something or someone was out of place; today, things are different. We usually know who our neighbors are by sight and we smile and a wave as we arrive home, then we retreat to our den of social media and entertainment gadgets. This new way of life has impacted neighborhood safety and security.

Our population has soared in recent years and, unfortunately, with more residents comes more criminal activity. Burglary and vandalism are crimes that routinely target neighborhoods. In 1972, the National Sheriff's Association started the Neighborhood Watch program to motivate residents to work with law enforcement. The idea is rooted in the days of colonial settlements when night watchmen patrolled the streets. The modern version of Neighborhood Watch was developed in response to requests from sheriffs and police chiefs who were looking for a crime prevention program that would involve citizens and address an increasing number of burglaries.

It's a simple concept that has big benefits. Potential criminals naturally seem to be deterred by Neighborhood Watch communities because the risk for them is higher there. Odds of being observed by neighbors who are intent on reporting what they witnessed to law enforcement are good, therefore the odds of being arrested are also good – the program works. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, crime is as much as 16% lower in Neighborhood Watch communities.

Our agency believes wholeheartedly in what this program does and will always partner with you to protect our communities. We encourage you to establish a Neighborhood Watch program and we look forward to being a resource for you in the years to come.

Sincerely,

**SALLY HERNANDEZ**  
Sheriff, Travis County



*Safety, Integrity, Tradition of Service*



# NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

NEW PROGRAM TRAINING GUIDE



**TRAVIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**  
COMMUNITY OUTREACH UNIT

512.854.9770 | [TSCOCCommunityOutreach@traviscountytexas.gov](mailto:TSCOCCommunityOutreach@traviscountytexas.gov)

# WARNING



NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH  
PROGRAM IN FORCE

We immediately report  
all **SUSPICIOUS PERSONS** and  
activities to the  
**TRAVIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Helpful Resources	3
Introduction	4
Texas Crime Clock	5
What is Neighborhood Watch?	6
How do I start a Neighborhood Watch Program?	7
Maintaining a Neighborhood Watch Program	8
Participant Guidelines	9
Suspicious Activity and Situations	11
Reporting Suspicious Activity	13
Suspect and Vehicle Identification	14
Sign Installation Guidelines	15
National Night Out	17

# HELPFUL RESOURCES

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## TRAVIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

**[www.tcsheriff.org](http://www.tcsheriff.org)**

Administration 512.854.9770

Non-emergency Dispatch 512.974.0845, option 3

## AUSTIN CRIME STOPPERS

**[www.austincrimestoppers.org](http://www.austincrimestoppers.org)**

Report Crime Tips

Tip Line 512.472.TIPS / 800.893.TIPS

Administration 512.452.5223

## NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

**[www.sheriffs.org](http://www.sheriffs.org)**

Find information on crime, crime prevention and other helpful links.

## USA ON WATCH

**[www.usaonwatch.org](http://www.usaonwatch.org)**

Register a watch program, find useful links and a neighborhood watch implementation manual.

## AMERICAN SECURITY EDUCATORS

**[www.americansecurityeducators.com](http://www.americansecurityeducators.com)**

Order signs, pamphlets and products for your program.

## NEXTDOOR

**[www.nextdoor.com](http://www.nextdoor.com)**

A private social network for you, your neighbors and your community; a great way to organize a watch program.

## CITIZEN OBSERVER

**[www.citizenobserver.com](http://www.citizenobserver.com)**

Stay connected and receive alerts from local law enforcement by email and messages to your phone.

## NATION NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH INSTITUTE

**[www.nnwi.org](http://www.nnwi.org)**

Purchase signs, pamphlets and products for your program.

## SPOT CRIME

**[www.spotcrime.com/tx](http://www.spotcrime.com/tx)**

City and county maps showing crime incident data, downtown to neighborhood crime activity, crime alerts and reports.

You can view Crime Statistics for your jurisdiction (select Chapter 10b, then select Travis County):

**[http://www.dps.texas.gov/administration/crime\\_records/pages/crimestatistics.htm](http://www.dps.texas.gov/administration/crime_records/pages/crimestatistics.htm)**

# INTRODUCTION

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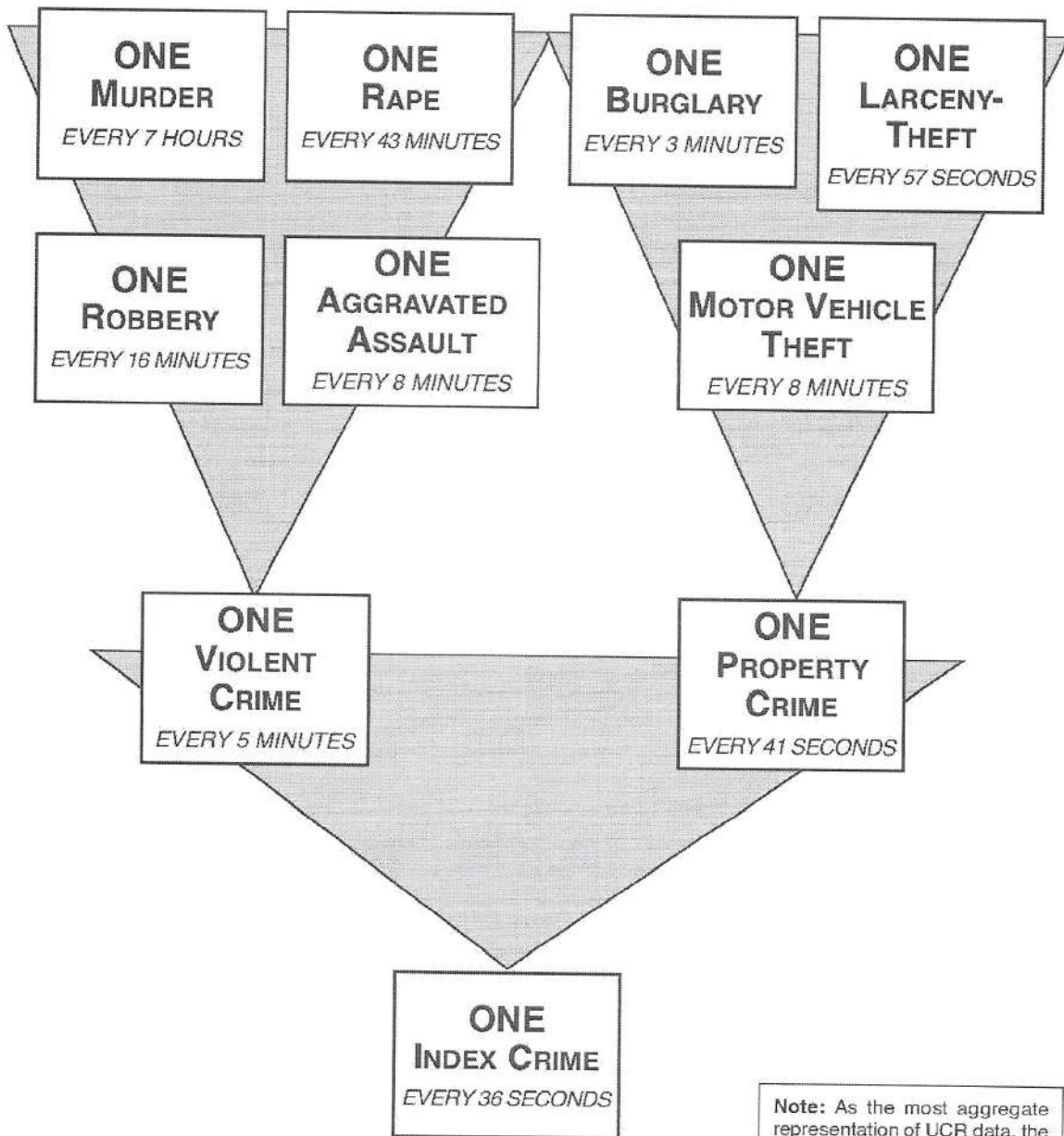
The Neighborhood Watch program is a self-help community crime prevention program with the main objective being to reduce crime by involving citizens in their communities. It also hinges on the basic crime prevention concept of reducing the opportunity for crimes to occur through education. The Neighborhood Watch program is the most effective means available for keeping crime out of our neighborhoods. It relies on the best crime fighting tool ever invented - a watchful neighbor. Fortunately, good neighbors are found everywhere; they live in houses, in apartment buildings, and in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

When neighbors work together with law enforcement one of the best crime fighting teams around is created. Be a watchful neighborhood and make your community safer from criminals by starting a Neighborhood Watch program in your neighborhood. Remember, people active alone will not win the battle against crime.

To help you start your Neighborhood Watch program, the Travis County Sheriff's Office has developed this guide to assist you in planning and organizing your first meetings. It explains how to work with your neighbors and law enforcement in starting and sustaining an effective Neighborhood Watch program. This guide also has information on special program activities, reporting suspicious activities, and other resourceful information.

Some would contend that crime prevention and citizen participation with law enforcement are both new concepts, but the prevention of crime has traditionally been both a police *duty* and a public *responsibility*. Criminal activity can only be reduced if individuals and communities assume their roles as partners with law enforcement. Crime is not inevitable. Much can be done to reduce crime and the individual and the community *can* have an impact.

# TEXAS CRIME CLOCK, 2015



**Note:** As the most aggregate representation of UCR data, the Crime Clock should be viewed with care. The Crime Clock conveys the relative frequency of Index Crimes. This display does not imply any regularity in the commission of crimes, but rather, the clock represents the annual ratio of crimes to fixed time intervals.



# WHAT IS NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH?

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Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program which enlists the active participation of citizens in cooperation with law enforcement to reduce crime in their communities.

It involves:

- Neighbors getting to know each other, taking the time to care about each other, and working together in a program of mutual assistance.
- Citizens being trained to recognize and report suspicious activities in their neighborhoods.
- Crime prevention strategies such as home security that are being implemented by citizens.

Neighborhood Watch was created to obtain citizen involvement in discouraging and preventing residential crime. Neighborhood Watch programs are not designed as substitutes for police protection, rather they supplement police activities by providing extra eyes and ears. When neighbors know each other personally they are more observant of such activities which are suspicious or out of place like strange cars in the neighborhood or suspicious persons who are at your home while you are away.

The participants make their neighborhood a safer place to live by becoming more active and involved in their neighborhood activities. As a result, they become more aware of problems when they occur. This will not take a lot of time and soon will develop into a daily routine of watching out for what goes on in your neighborhood. Neighborhood Watch programs help to create an identity within the neighborhood which in turn fosters a sense of pride and belonging for the participants.

## HOW NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH **WORKS**

Neighborhood Watch operates to educate participants in the principles of deterrence, delay and detection. The program depends on a communications network organized with three levels of participants: the residents, blocks captains, and representatives from the Travis County Sheriff's Office Community Outreach Unit. Reduction in burglary is likely because it is a well-publicized program of prevention coupled with citizen concern for the safety and security of the neighborhood.



# HOW DO I START A NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM?

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## TALK WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS

- Explain that you would like to start a Neighborhood Watch program.
- Discuss crime problems in your area. Community Outreach Unit officers can assist you in determining the extent of the crime problem and provide you with information on specific crime statistics for your neighborhood.
- Briefly explain the value of the Neighborhood Watch program and its potential impact on local crime.
- Invite them to attend a neighborhood meeting to discuss starting a Neighborhood Watch program. Be sure to mention that Neighborhood Watch does not require that they attend frequent meetings and it does not ask that anyone take any personal risks to prevent crime.

## CONTACT THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE COMMUNITY OUTREACH UNIT AT 512.854.9770

- Explain that you would like to start a Neighborhood Watch program in your area and ask for assistance.
- Be prepared to discuss the size and boundaries of the proposed Neighborhood Watch program with the officer at that time.
- Coordinate a date and time for the first Neighborhood Watch orientation meeting with the officer.

## PLANNING THE FIRST NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH MEETING

- Make arrangements to use a convenient meeting place that will accommodate the number of people expected to attend. If the size of the group allows, meet in someone's home to foster an informal, comfortable atmosphere.
- Design a simple flyer to notify neighborhood residents of the time and place of the meeting. Place the flyers on community bulletin boards in stores, churches, post offices, etc. or deliver them to every home in the area. Plan ahead to allow every one plenty of notice.
- Distribute name tags and ask attendees to sign in as they arrive. Provide refreshments such as coffee and cookies. This all helps to create a relaxed atmosphere and encourages people to get to know each other.

*Remember, don't be disappointed if everyone cannot attend. 100% neighborhood participation is desirable but is not required for the program to work.*

# PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

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## **As a Member of Neighborhood Watch you should:**

- Get to know your neighbors. Know their names and be able to identify them and their vehicles by sight.
- Maintain a map of your neighborhood along with the names, addresses and telephone numbers of your neighbors. You should also have daytime work telephone numbers in case you need to contact them at work or a relative's number in case of an emergency while your neighbor is away and unavailable.
- Implement home security measures to make your residence unattractive to a potential burglar.
- Take photos of your valuable property, including serial numbers, and conduct a complete inventory of your valuables on a regular basis.
- Be watchful over your neighbors' homes, especially when they are away or on vacation.
- Write down license plate numbers and descriptions of suspicious looking vehicles and persons in the neighborhood and report them to the Sheriff's Office immediately.

## **As a Block Captain you should:**

- Be familiar with your assigned area and its members.
- Keep residents informed of meetings, crime concerns in your area, and new residents.
- Recruit new members as they move into your neighborhood, and encourage participation for members that have lost interest.
- Attend quarterly Block Captain meetings.

## **As a Program Coordinator you should:**

- Provide leadership and organization to the group.
- Plan and schedule group action, monthly meetings, and quarterly Block Captain meetings.
- Preside over meetings and supervise neighborhood newsletter.
- Work with Blocks Captains to establish block boundaries and fill Block Captain vacancies.
- Supervise collection of funds for Neighborhood Watch signs and stickers.
- Serve as a liaison with the Travis County Sheriff's Office and notify them of any new programs or updated contact information.



# SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES & SITUATIONS

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What actually constitutes a suspicious person? "Suspicious" is actually a very broad term and could apply to a multitude of situations; however, we have compiled the following situations which will help guide you in determining if a particular person or incident should be reported. These situations serve as a guideline only. It is impossible to list every possible type of suspicious behavior, so be alert and use good judgment and common sense. If you are in doubt, notify the Sheriff's Office anyway. It is always best to check it out than to wait and wonder if you could have prevented a crime.

## **BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING:**

1. **SOMEONE GOING DOOR-TO-DOOR IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.** Watch for a short time to be certain that the canvas is legitimate. Observe whether the person tries a door to see if it is unlocked, looks into the windows, or goes into the backyard, etc.
2. **WAITING OR LOITERING IN FRONT OF A HOUSE OR BUSINESS.** Especially if the business is closed or the homeowner is away. This could be a burglar casing the premises.
3. **SOMEONE FORCING A DOOR OPEN.** This could be just someone who accidentally locked himself out, but it also could be someone attempting a burglary, theft, or vandalism.
4. **A BROKEN WINDOW PANE or a door standing ajar to a business or residence could mean that it has been burglarized.** Beware because the burglar may still be inside. Never go into a business. Call the Sheriff's Office and let the responding deputies ensure the potential burglar is no longer inside.
5. **A PERSON CARRYING UNUSUAL PROPERTY** such as TV's, stereos, guns, or other items (especially at night). This could be a suspect fleeing the scene of a burglary or theft.
6. **SOMEONE LOADING PROPERTY INTO A VEHICLE** in an unusual place or hour. This could be a burglary in progress.
7. **VEHICLES DRIVING SLOWLY THROUGH THE NEIGHBORHOOD** with no apparent destination or with the headlights turned off. Burglars may be casing the neighborhood looking for an easy target.
8. **PERSONS LOITERING AROUND CARS** or going from car to car looking into them. They may be looking for a car to steal or to break into.
9. **SOMEONE RUNNING OR TRYING TO HIDE,** especially if they appear panicked or are carrying property or a gun. They could be a burglary or a robbery suspect trying to elude law enforcement officers. Try to safely keep tabs on the person and immediately call the police.



# REPORTING SUSPICIOUS/CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

## IF A CRIME OCCURS REPORT IT!

Sound easy? Unfortunately, only about half of all crimes are ever reported. Law enforcement officers are unable to do anything about the crime if they don't know about it or if they are notified several days after the fact. Eyewitness information is the key to solving most crimes. If you witness a crime, you need to report it. The purpose for reporting suspicious activity is to prevent a crime from occurring.

### Remember these tips for reporting criminal or suspicious activity:

1. Notify the Sheriff's Office immediately by calling **9-1-1**. You can also contact Patrol Services directly by calling 512-974-0845 (option 3). \*Remember that in an **EMERGENCY** if you do call **9-1-1** your address and telephone number may not be immediately available to the operator. Provide this information first in case you get disconnected.
2. Tell the 9-1-1 Operator as much as you can about the incident; no fact is too trivial. In many cases it is what victims and witnesses tell law enforcement officers about the offender that results in the arrest of that person. Please remember that incorrect information is worse than no information at all and can sometimes hinder an investigation or search allowing the offenders to evade capture and arrest.

When calling it is sometimes important to provide the following information:

- What occurred?
  - When did the incident occur?
  - Where did it happen?
  - How many suspects were there?
    - What did they say?
    - What did they do?
    - Did they take anything?
    - What direction did they leave?
    - Were they in a vehicle?
    - Were there any other witnesses?
    - Is there any other information, which you feel is important?
3. Describe the suspects. Copy the form on the next page and keep it near the phone. Fill it out after the crime has occurred and give the information to the 9-1-1 Operator when you report the crime. You may then want to give the form to the first officer on the scene.
  4. Describe the suspect vehicle and the direction of travel. Use the form on the next page.
  5. Sheriff's Office procedure prohibits the release of the identity of a caller or witness. If you report a crime or suspicious activity you do not have to be contacted by an officer, and you may choose not to give your name. However, a valuable witness is one that we can contact later for more detailed information or even a statement.

*Sometimes, due to limited resources and personnel, Sheriff's Deputies may not be able to respond immediately to your call. We must prioritize calls based on apparent danger to human life. Please be patient, as we will respond as soon as possible.*

# SIGN INSTALLATION GUIDELINES

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The purchase and installation of Neighborhood Watch signs are the responsibility of the Neighborhood Watch program or the neighborhood association sponsoring the program. Neighborhood Watch signs like the one on the next page can be purchased from any sign vendor provided they meet certain requirements; however, the Travis County Sheriff's Office recommends that the signs be purchased from the vendors indicated inside the front cover of this manual. The Neighborhood Watch materials featured by these vendors are in compliance with the National Sheriff's Association Neighborhood Watch program standards.

The following requirements have been imposed by the Travis County Sheriff's Office to ensure continuity and safety in the Travis County Neighborhood Watch program.

- Neighborhood Watch signs should be a minimum size of 24"x 36" to provide for adequate visibility.
- Neighborhood Watch signs should conform to the National Sheriff's Association design (white and orange in color with black lettering, and the word SHERIFF shall appear in the bottom portion of the sign). Personalized signs indicating either the name of the Neighborhood Watch program or the Travis County Sheriff's Office may be purchased by the program or the association for an additional charge.
- Neighborhood Watch signs must not be attached to any regulatory or directional sign post owned by the county, state or other governmental agency. Neighborhood Watch signs must not be placed in the county or state right-of-way, UNLESS the Neighborhood Watch program is *certified by the Travis County Sheriff's Office*. With proper authorization, signs may be posted on private property or on any structure owned by the neighborhood or homeowner's association. When posting signs on poles in the county or state right-of-way, the sign pole must be located a minimum of six feet from the edge (or curb) of the roadway, and there must be a minimum clearance of seven feet from the bottom of the sign to the ground.

To erect signs in your neighborhood, contact Transportation and Natural Resources Road & Bridge Division:

Jaime Garcia 512.266.3314 | [jaime.garcia@traviscountytexas.gov](mailto:jaime.garcia@traviscountytexas.gov)



# NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

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National Night Out (NNO) is an annual event historically held on one of two dates in the Summer or Fall months. NNO is sponsored by the National Association of Town Watch. Past year's NNO campaigns involved citizens, law enforcement agencies, civics groups, businesses, neighborhood organizations and local public officials from over 9,000 communities from all 50 states, U.S. territories, Canadian cities and military bases worldwide. In all, over 29.5 million participated in NNO last year.

NNO is designed to heighten crime and drug prevention awareness, generate support for and participation in local anti-crime efforts, and to strengthen neighborhood spirit and law enforcement - community partnership. Its primary goal is to send a strong message to criminals to let them know that neighborhoods are organized and fighting back.

Along with the traditional display of porch lights and front yard vigils, cities, towns and neighborhoods celebrate NNO with a variety of events and activities to include block parties, cook-outs, visits from local law enforcement officers, parades, flashlight walks, contests, and youth programs. NNO has proven to be an effective, inexpensive and enjoyable program to promote neighborhood spirit and police - community partnership in our fight for safer communities. The benefits your community will derive from NNO will most certainly extend well beyond the one night.

The Travis County Sheriff's Office has promoted NNO since its inception. Our participation has grown from helping with a handful of neighborhood gatherings to over 4,000 participants enjoying block parties, carnivals, parades, and an assortment of other activities. Our involvement has grown from a couple of crime prevention officers, to dozens of Patrol Deputies, Sergeants, Lieutenants, Captains, Majors, County Commissioners, and the Sheriff.

Our local efforts and participation in the NNO program have been recognized nationally by the National Association of Town Watch. The first-time registry earned a rank of 14<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the population group 100,000 - 250,000.

NNO is a great way to get together with your neighbors, find out what's going on in your community and visit with local law enforcement officers about what you can do to help reduce the opportunities for crimes to occur. Participation can be as simple as a small block party or as big as a parade and a carnival.

To get involved or to find out how to register your event for National Night Out, visit the NNO website at: **[www.natw.org/nno](http://www.natw.org/nno)**

You can also register your event locally by contacting the Travis County Sheriff's Office Community Outreach: 512.854-9770 | [TSCOCCommunityOutreach@traviscountytx.gov](mailto:TSCOCCommunityOutreach@traviscountytx.gov)