

**DOUGLAS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**  
**NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM**  
**BLOCK CAPTAIN GUIDE**

You have now entered the wonderful world of Crime Prevention. Thank you for taking the first step in a proactive approach to fighting crime. You have volunteered to become your neighborhood's block captain. Do not be scared! It is a painless and low maintenance position. Douglas County needs committed citizens to take a stand and take responsibility for the things that happen in their neighborhoods. Welcome to the Douglas County Sheriff's Office Neighborhood Watch Program!

Neighborhood Watch is a community-based crime prevention program that is part of the Douglas County Sheriff's Office Community Relations Unit. Neighborhood Watch Block Captains are people who take an active role in making their neighborhoods safer. This guide is designed to assist the block captain in organizing their neighborhood. We believe that the information we bring to you is the best of what is currently available. This, however, does not guarantee that you will be protected from victimization. The initial responsibility for neighborhood peace of mind is yours. This along with an effective, coordinated effort with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office will help to reduce crime in the community.

Neighborhood peace of mind goes beyond locks, alarms and block meetings. It encompasses all those things that affect the environment of an area, including streets, lights, citizen needs, nuisance and disputes between residents.

Through encouraging citizens participation, supporting neighborhood associations, facilitating neighborhood mediation, and helping people plan effective crime prevention programs, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office Community Relations Unit provides the county with the information and resources it needs to improve livability and reduce fear of crime.

Thank you again for your time and dedication.

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## **NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM**

Neighborhood Watch is a program designed to increase security on neighborhood blocks by involving as many individuals and families as possible in a united crime prevention effort. Participants in Neighborhood Watch learn:

- ❖ To be familiar with neighbors and activities on the block,
- ❖ To recognize and report suspicious activity,
- ❖ To increase home security,
- ❖ To learn how to engrave property correctly,
- ❖ To communicate with neighbors on a regular basis using block maps, phone trees, etc.

### **OUR MISSION**

We believe that citizens have the right to livable and secure neighborhoods in order to pursue their lives free from fear and crime.

We believe it is the responsibility of citizens to build and maintain livable and cohesive neighborhoods and to support and assist each other in the prevention of crime.

We believe citizen involvement is an integral part of maintaining an effective and vital law enforcement service and that it is a proper role of deputies and other government agencies to provide resources to citizens who are working to improve the safety of their neighborhoods.

We believe that committed citizens and committed deputies, working cooperatively toward these ends, create a secure community and reduce vulnerability to crime.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD GOALS**

1. We, along with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office will reduce the level of fear of crime in our neighborhoods.
2. We, as citizens, will accept the responsibility to increase neighborhood livability and reduce crime in our neighborhoods.

## **GETTING STARTED: INITIAL STEPS TO ORGANIZING**

You have already taken the first step by contacting the Douglas County Sheriff's Office Community Relations Unit. Here are some standard steps to ensure strong attendance and participation during organizing your Neighborhood Watch Program.

1. Talk with some of your neighbors to get a good sense of the best time, date and place for a meeting. Ask them about their crime concerns and about any other block issues they may have. They may also provide you with information on suspicious activity or people on the block.
2. Decide what area you are going to organize. At a minimum, invite neighbors who have a fairly direct view of each other's house or apartment. For a standard city block, this may include both sides of the street, corner houses that look down your block and backyard neighbors where applicable.
3. Set the time, date and place for your meeting based on the information you have received. Choose a meeting place that comfortably accommodates the neighbors you have invited. The Community Relations Specialists will assist you in locating a meeting place if one is needed.
4. Use written invitations to notify neighbors. The Community Relations Specialists can provide you with these or you can design your own. Distribute the invitations well in advance of the meeting. Try to make personal contact with each block member. This way you can gather information for your block map and profile in advance of the meeting.
5. Seek help from the neighbors you contact. They may volunteer to help you with refreshments, folding chairs, and escorting seniors to the meeting and assisting you with organizing. This will already be helping you build a network of participating neighbors.
6. Try to confirm the time and place with the Community Relations Unit at least one day in advance. Have several block members help you remind the neighbors of the meeting.
7. At the meeting, have your sign up sheet and any other materials ready to circulate. Nametags for each neighbor are also helpful in getting to know one another.

## **BLOCK CAPTAIN'S TASK CHECKLIST**

It is important and also helpful to identify one or two people willing to assist the block captain. The block captain ensures that the basic needs of the Neighborhood Watch Program tasks are assigned and completed. The assistant helps fulfill this need. The block captain and assistant act as the liaison between block members, the community and the Community Relations Unit. They also make sure that the block maintains an active program. This last step is probably the most important and sometimes the most difficult.

The strength of the block depends on committed neighbors helping one another. Everyone has something they can do to help.

### **HELPFUL ACTIVITIES**

- ◆ Help neighbors secure their homes.
- ◆ Help a senior citizen trim shrubbery or install lighting.
- ◆ Haul clippings to the dump or arrange for a drop box on the block.
- ◆ Offer your home for a follow-up meeting.
- ◆ Arrange the details for a block party.
- ◆ Distribute neighborhood newsletters.
- ◆ Write and distribute occasional Crime Prevention newsletters. (The Community Relations Specialist will assist in this, if needed)
- ◆ Escort senior citizens to the grocery store.
- ◆ Have the Community Relations Specialist do a follow up meeting on residential security surveys.
- ◆ Nightly citizens patrols around the neighborhood to check for anything that may be out of place or suspicious.

There are plenty of activities that can bring the neighbors together. The only thing that will hold you down is the lack of imagination.

We also feel that each neighborhood should purchase at least two Neighborhood Watch Program signs for their block. These signs can be a very effective tool in crime prevention. It lets potential criminals know that the neighborhood they are about to victimize contains citizens that have been educated in how to recognize suspicious activity and who to call when it occurs.

The signs can be purchased through the Douglas County Sheriff's Office. We purchase them directly from "The Sign Center." The price varies on size and quantity. Window decals will be provided by the Sheriff's Office for the blocks that purchase signs. If every neighbor pitches in a couple of dollars to purchase the signs, it will be very cost effective.

## **GETTING TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS**

One of the first steps of the Neighborhood Watch Program is getting to know your neighbors. Whether you prefer to do so at a block meeting or a one-on-one is up to you. It is important to obtain specific information about each household included in the program for a couple of different reasons. The first is that the Douglas County Sheriff's Office Community Relations Unit retains a confidential data base of every member involved in the program. This information may be needed if we need to contact someone at that particular address. The second reason is that the block captain needs to have the information in the event of notification of an event or even a crime happening in that area.

There are different methods to obtaining this information. The following are suggestions, but the most important thing is to get complete and accurate information.

- Block map: This gives you a visual perspective of your block. It's a handy way to remember who lives where and makes it easy to explain the layout of your block to the 911 operator.
- Telephone Tree: An effective method for sharing information between neighbors. Each neighbor is responsible for calling one or two other block members when problems arise.
- Basic neighborhood list: This is just a basic list of the neighbor included in your program.

Discuss strengths and weaknesses of your block with your neighbors including visibility, areas of high daytime vacancy, which has dogs, routine activities, etc. Your neighbors should keep their block information records in a safe, accessible place.

The more information you share with each other, the better you are able to recognize when something suspicious is occurring. Most burglars "case" a neighborhood, paying attention to schedules, activities and alertness of neighbors. If a burglar strives to become familiar with patterns on your block, shouldn't you be familiar with as well? Even up the odds between you and the potential thief.

The following page is a list that needs to be filled out and returned to the Community Relations Specialist. This information will remain confidential and will only be used as a database of those involved in the program.

The Neighborhood Watch Program is a highly effective tool, not only in neighborhood communication, but also crime prevention. Thank you so much for your time and commitment.



