

# Neighborhood Watch

## *A Proactive Community Safety Program*

*Help keep Rancho Santa Margarita  
one of the safest cities in Orange County*



## What Is Neighborhood Watch?

Neighborhood Watch is one of the most effective and least costly ways to help prevent crime in your neighborhood. Communication and collaboration between the community and the Police will enhance neighborhood security, heighten the community's power of observation, and encourage mutual assistance and concern among neighbors.

## The Need For The Program:

In recent years, neighborhoods have experienced changes in the way we live. The old, well-established neighborhood has been replaced by a highly transient, growing community where people seek more and more privacy. This life-style tends to promote unfamiliarity with neighbors along with a corresponding lack of concern and increases the community's vulnerability to crime.

## How Neighborhood Watch Works:

The program calls upon residents to step forward and assist the police in organizing the community into a cohesive unit working toward the goal of building a safer, crime-free neighborhood.

### When a group decides to form a Neighborhood Watch, it:

- Contacts the Police for help in training members in home security and reporting skills and for information on local crime patterns.
- Selects a coordinator and Block Captains who are responsible for organizing meetings and relaying information to members. The Block Captain plays a pivotal role in the success of the Neighborhood Watch program.
- Recruits members, keeps up-to-date on new residents and makes special efforts to involve the elderly, working parents, and young people.
- Works with the Police to install Neighborhood Watch signs, usually after at least 50 percent of all households in a neighborhood are enrolled and after two group meetings.

### What to expect at the first group Neighborhood Watch meeting:

- Police will address neighborhood concerns and answer questions; provide instruction on maintaining your safe community; and train residents on how to recognize and report suspicious activity.

### What to expect at the second group Neighborhood Watch meeting:

- Police will share information on how to strengthen your home security; provide tips on how to make your house less attractive to a criminal; and provide personal safety tips on keeping you and your family safe at home and while out in the community.

### What to expect at follow-up meetings:

- Police will supply alert bulletins, information on new programs and emergency preparedness.

### Keeping your Neighborhood Watch Group Active

- It's an unfortunate fact that when a neighborhood crime crisis goes away, so does enthusiasm for Neighborhood Watch. Work to keep your group a vital force for community well-being. Consider publishing a newsletter that provides crime prevention tips and local crime news. Try to plan periodic social events that give neighbors a chance to know each other.

## Important Phone Numbers:



*For emergencies, call 9-1-1 immediately*

*For non-emergencies, call Orange County Sheriff's Dispatch at (949) 770-6011*

*For Police related Administrative questions, call RSM Police Services at (949) 635-1819*

*For more information about Neighborhood Watch, call Deputy Clay Cranford at (949) 635-1830*

## Helpful Information That Will Assist The Police:

*What happened?      When did it happen?      Where did it happen?      Was anyone hurt?*

**Description of Persons:** (Include clothing). When describing suspects, notice their age, race, sex, height and weight. Compare your own weight and height with the suspects. Pick out some unique characteristics (scars, nose, jewelry, etc.) that will help you identify the suspect in the future if need be.

**Description of Vehicle:** License number, make, model, color, any noticeable damage and direction of travel.

## What Is Suspicious?

The effectiveness of a Police department's crime prevention efforts is enhanced by active participation on the part of citizens. By calling to report suspicious persons or activity, you not only aid the Police, you help to make your community a safer place to live.

Some people fail to call simply because they are not aware of activities that might be suspicious. Others may notice suspicious activity and hesitate to call for fear of being labeled a "nosey neighbor" or an "over-reactor." Still others take it for granted that someone else has already called.

We encourage you to call **9-1-1** (*for emergencies*) or **(949) 770-6011** (*non-emergency/dispatch*) immediately when you observe suspicious activity. Do not worry about "bothering" them or worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove unfounded. ***Think instead about what could happen if you do not act.***

## Obvious Things To Watch For Are:

Basically, anything that seems even slightly "out of place" or is occurring at an unusual time of day or night, could be criminal activity. Some of the most obvious activities to watch for and report include:

- A stranger entering your neighbor's house when it is unoccupied (may be a burglar)
- A scream heard anywhere (might indicate a robbery or assault)
- Offers of merchandise at ridiculously low prices (could be stolen property)
- Anyone removing accessories, license plates or gas from a car
- Anyone peering into parked cars may be looking for valuables to take or even a car to steal
- Persons entering or leaving a business place after hours (could be burglars)
- Anyone forcing entrance into, or tampering with a residence/business/vehicle
- Gunshots heard in the neighborhood

## Some Of The “Not So Obvious Things” To Watch For Are:

Not every stranger who comes into your neighborhood is a criminal by any means. There are many perfectly legitimate door-to-door salesmen, repairmen, and servicemen moving around our neighborhoods all the time. But criminals do take advantage of this by assuming the guise of legitimate business representatives. After all, if a criminal “looked like a criminal,” no one would have any trouble spotting them. Check identification of all solicitors, meter readers, and repairmen prior to allowing entry into your home.

### Be suspicious of:

- Any alleged deliveryman with a wrong address or asking if someone else lives there.
- If someone is going door-to-door in your neighborhood – watch them for a while. If, after a few houses are visited, one or more of the persons tries a door to see if it is locked, looks into windows or goes into a back or side yard, it could be a burglar. Such action is even more suspicious if one person remains in the front when this occurs or if there is a car following a few houses away. Call immediately, do not wait for the person to leave.
- One or more juveniles walking through the neighborhood looking into automobiles, backyards, etc.
- A person running, especially if carrying something of value.
- Someone carrying property, especially if it is at an unusual hour, or in an unusual place, or if the property is not wrapped as if it was just purchased.
- A person exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms. He/she may be injured, under the influence of drugs or needs medical or psychiatric assistance. This is a 9-1-1 call!
- Lots of people or vehicles going to and from a certain residence, especially if it occurs on a daily or regular basis or during late/unusual hours. It could possibly be the scene of drug activities or a fence operation.
- Any person taking a shortcut through a backyard may have just broken into your neighbor’s home.
- Any vehicle moving slowly and without lights or following a course that appears aimless or repetitive in any location, particularly in areas of schools, parks and playgrounds. Occupants may be looking for places to rob or burglarize, or they could be drug pushers or sex offenders.
- Parked, occupied vehicles containing one or more persons, especially if it is an unusual hour - they could be lookouts for a burglary in progress. Always try to obtain the license plate number and vehicle color (make & model if possible).
- Vehicles being loaded with valuables if parked in front of a closed business or unattended residence - even if the vehicle is a legitimate looking commercial vehicle. More and more professional thieves are taking the time and trouble to customize their vehicles with special signs in order to move more freely without suspicion.
- Apparent business transactions conducted from a vehicle especially around schools or parks. If juveniles are involved, it could mean a possible drug sale.
- Persons being forced into vehicles, especially if it is juveniles or females, it may mean a kidnapping is in progress.
- An abandoned vehicle parked on your block – it may be a stolen car.
- Continuous repair operations at non-business locations could mean stolen property is being stripped, repainted or otherwise altered.
- Open or broken doors or windows at a closed business or residence. If the owners are absent, it could mean a burglary is in progress or already completed.
- A beam from a flashlight in a neighbor’s home, especially if the neighbors are away.
- Persons wearing or carrying bloody clothing or objects could be a suspect or victim of a serious crime. This is a 9-1-1 call!
- Persons making a quick change of vehicles may be attempting to elude the police or abandoning a stolen vehicle.

While some, if not all, of the suspicious situations described above could have innocent explanations, the Police would rather investigate a crime-prone situation than be called when it is too late. ***Your call could save a life, prevent an injury, or stop a criminal act. Be alert and don’t be afraid to call the Police.***