



How to Form a Neighborhood Watch Group for your Street or Building*



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What Is Neighborhood Watch?

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program that enlists the active participation of residents in cooperation with the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) to reduce crime, solve problems, and improve the quality of life in your area. You will get to know your neighbors, and learn how to:

- Recognize and report crimes and suspicious activities
- Protect yourself, your family, and your property,
- Protect your neighbor's family and property, and
- Identify crime and disorder problems in your area and work with SDPD personnel to solve them.

How to start and maintain a Neighborhood Watch program

- Start the conversation. Talk to the neighbors you know about a Neighborhood Watch Group on your street. Tell them about the benefits of a program and the problems to be addressed. Ask your neighbors to talk to their acquaintances also. Share with them the purpose of Neighborhood Watch. Start to form a contact list of email addresses and phone numbers.
- Determine a convenient time and place for the first meeting. Small groups can meet in the home of a neighbor. Larger groups can meet in a public building, community center or park. Once a date and time has been set for the first meeting, contact your Neighborhood Watch Coordinator.
- Invite your neighbors to a meeting. Post your event on Nextdoor, distribute fliers, make phone calls, and/or send emails. Send out reminders a few days before the meeting.
- Prepare an agenda and sign-in sheet for the first meeting. Ask your Neighborhood Watch Coordinator and/or Community Relations Officer (CRO) to talk about the crime and disorder problems in your area, how to get crime statistics and crime prevention information, and how the partnership with the SDPD will work. The meeting should last about one hour. Consider providing refreshments, e.g., cookies and coffee. The agenda should allow time for questions, answers, and other topics.
- Hold your first meeting. The first meeting is critical in forming of a group. All attendees should introduce themselves and sign a sheet with their names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses so they can be contacted about future meetings and activities. They should be assured that their personal information will not be given to anyone without their permission. The CRO (if available) will talk about the topics listed above and answer questions.
- Ask for volunteers to serve as Block Captains or Co-Captains.
- Define the area to be covered by each Captain. The area covered by a group in a neighborhood with single-family homes can range from several homes on one side of a street to several blocks with homes on both sides of the streets. The area can also include neighborhood parks, canyons, etc. The area covered in a neighborhood with apartment complexes can range from a single complex to several complexes.

The initial duties of the Block Captain or Co-Captains

- Conduct the first meeting
- Encourage participants to sign-up for Nextdoor, the social network for neighborhoods
- Compile a membership list, with email addresses and phone numbers
- Collect money for Neighborhood Watch signs.

Continuing duties of the Block Captain or Co-Captains

After the group is formed, the Block Captain's duties will depend on the nature and objectives of the group. The following are some possibilities:

- Recruit new members
- Encourage all members to use Nextdoor to facilitate communication
- Maintain a membership address and email list
- Keep members informed about area crime and disorder; send out periodic emails; post on Nextdoor
- Try to see group members frequently
- Establish and maintain a phone tree with home and work numbers that group members can use to contact residents in an emergency; Nextdoor may also be used for communication
- Act as a spokesperson for the group
- Serve as liaison with the SDPD
- Plan, announce, and facilitate meetings
- Organize crime prevention activities, e.g., watching homes when residents are away.

Keep your Neighborhood Watch group active and engaged

Special events are a good way to keep the group active. The following are some possibilities:

- Painting reflective address numbers on curbs and alley fences or garages
- Meetings to address a specific incident or series of crimes
- Neighborhood walks to identify potential crime and disorder problems
- Socials, e.g., parties or potluck dinners; Neighborhood Night Out
- Cleaning streets, vacant lots, canyons, parks, etc.
- Graffiti paint outs
- Fundraising to buy signs, e.g., by collecting recyclables.

Refer to <http://www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/programs/neighborhoodwatch.shtml> for more information about Neighborhood Watch.

*Adapted from SDPD information; based on personal experience by University City Neighborhood Watch Coordinator Barbara Gellman. For more information, visit <http://www.universitycitynews.org/> or email bggellman@yahoo.com.