

Dallas Police Department



Crime Watch Handbook

How to Start a Crime Watch

A crime watch program is an organization of concerned citizens working together as good neighbors to reduce the crime in their neighborhood. Crime watch programs take many forms, but in all cases, organization by blocks is the cornerstone of all citizens' crime prevention programs. Natural neighborhood boundaries such as major streets, creeks, or parks may further define the neighborhood. The following guidelines will help establish a successful crime watch.

Procedures

1. Contact the crime watch officer at your substation. His or her telephone number is included in Section I of this manual. Crime watch efforts should be coordination through this officer to avoid duplication of efforts. Explain that you would like to start a crime watch (neighborhood, apartment, or business) and ask for any assistance that the DPD might offer.
2. Discuss the size and boundaries of the area considered for the program. The officer will know where the boundaries of other groups end and may have suggestions for a manageable area if your neighborhood boundaries are not readily defines. Although the police department generally recommends that each crime watch group cover a complete reporting area, in practice reporting area boundaries often are not the same as natural neighborhood boundaries. Apartment or business crime watch boundaries are usually more easily determined.
3. Talk with neighbors and friends in the area. Ask for their participation in a small core group to take the first steps. Explain the need for and the value of a crime watch. Decide on the exact boundaries of the area to be organized.
4. Some of the substations have crime watch support groups in which experienced crime watch chairpersons have volunteered to answer questions and act as mentors to new crime watch groups. Ask your crime watch officer if he or she can put you in touch with another chairperson who may be willing to advise you.
5. Become familiar with the duties of the crime watch chairperson, section coordinators, block captains, and participants so that you will be able to answer questions. Always be on the alert to recruit interested volunteers.
6. The officer will be able to provide actual crime information for your area. Become familiar with the crime statistics. Armed with this knowledge, convincing neighbors of the need for a crime watch will be easier. Often neighbors are not aware of the extent of crime in the area.
7. Plan the first neighborhood meeting. Choose a date and time that will be convenient for most neighbors and the police representative. Choose a convenient location known to most neighbors such as a school auditorium or church. Encourage neighbors to bring refreshments to help "break the ice".

Crime Watch Chairperson

A crime watch cannot work well without citizen volunteers in key positions to assume certain duties and responsibilities. Primary among these volunteers is the crime watch chairperson. The chairperson is the leader who generally organizes the other volunteers and who acts as liaison with the Dallas Police Department (DPD).

Who Should Be the Chairperson?

Often the chairperson is the one who initiated the move to organize the crime watch. Some neighborhoods hold elections for this position as often as annually. Most neighborhoods are more informal; the person who exhibits the most interest takes on the position and maintains it for several years. In neighborhoods with active homeowners' associations, the chairperson may be the association's president or may be a committee head. Often the crime watch organization is independent and separate from the homeowner's association. There is no one right way to determine who should be the chairperson. Each neighborhood should do what suits it best.

How Long Should the Term Be?

Most neighborhoods have no set term limit for their leader. From the standpoint of the police department and many crime watch members, a chairperson who continues year after year may be more effective because of the expertise gained over a period of years. On the other hand, if procedures are not established in advance it may be difficult for members to replace an inactive or ineffective chairperson.

Responsibilities of the Chairperson

The chairperson has **overall responsibility** for all activities of the crime watch group. Depending upon the size of the neighborhood and the level of involvement of the neighbors, the chairperson may do virtually everything solely or may delegate one or many activities to individual volunteers, committees of volunteers, block captains, or section coordinators.

Some neighborhoods expect and demand that their leaders be democratic in their approach to program development. Other groups expect a leader to direct the program. Typically, successful groups periodically will offer their members a forum for suggestions and the opportunity to get involved with the organization.

As a rule, chairpersons are personally involved in most activities during the organizational stage of the crime watch group, but may begin to delegate duties as block captains are recruited and a core of volunteers is built up. Delegation of at least some of the duties is recommended whenever possible so as not to overburden the crime watch leader.

Crime Watch Participant Guidelines

The best way to take an active part in crime prevention is to participate in a crime watch in which each person becomes more alert and aware of what is going on within the area.

Participation in a crime watch is not an activity that requires a lot of time. It means only that each person adopts a more observant attitude on a daily basis. Neighbors will get to know each other better, and as a result, will become more aware of strange cars, persons, or circumstances, which might be a danger and require calling the police. The following guidelines have proven to be successful:

- **Get to know the neighbors.** Know their names and be able to identify them and their vehicles by sight.
- **Maintain a map or block directory** of the immediate neighborhood with names, addresses, and phone numbers.
- **Make the home as burglar-resistant as possible.**
- **Mark all property for identification** by using the Operation ID program.
- **Register your vehicles under the Texas HEAT program.**
- **Be observant and watch over neighbors' homes**, especially when they are not at home or are out of town.
- **Write down license numbers and descriptions** of suspicious looking persons and vehicles, and immediately report them to the police at 911.
- **Report information that may be helpful** to the crime watch chairperson.
- **Call the neighborhood voice mail** on a regular basis to keep informed.
- **Educate children** in crime prevention and teach respect for law enforcement officers.
- **Volunteer to help your crime watch organization** in any way that you can, whether it involves your time or financial support.

Reporting Suspicious Activity

Anything that seems slightly "out of place" or is occurring at an unusual time of day can be criminal activity. **Call the police at 911 immediately** about all suspicious activity. Do not worry that you are bothering the police or about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove to be unfounded. Think instead about what can happen if you don't act. A listing of suspicious activities is included in Section VI.

All calls to the police to report crimes or suspicious activity should be made to 911. The police department prefers to investigate than to be called when it is too late. Your call can save a life, prevent an injury, or stop a criminal act. **Be alert!**

Keep your crime watch chairperson informed of any crimes or suspicious activities in the area so that other neighbors may be informed. Armed with this knowledge, neighbors may take action that can prevent a similar crime from happening to them. Neighborhoods with voice mail or phone trees are able to pass this information along to all of the neighbors in a short period of time, thus alerting the entire neighborhood to be "on the look-out."

Additional Information

See section VI for instructions for Making a Report to the Police Department. Operation ID, HEAT, and Home Security Methods are discussed in Section VII.

www.northeastcrimewatch.org

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Chapter V Crime Watch Meetings

The initial crime watch meetings, often described as organizational meetings, may be the most important. Neighbors will determine whether they want to be involved based on the content of these meetings. A friendly, professional presentation will go a long way toward generating enthusiasm among the neighbors.

Strategy Meeting

Although not required, a core group of interested neighbors may hold an informal meeting to discuss the aspects of organizing a crime watch group and the activities that might benefit your area. Contact your crime watch officer for information and materials that will be helpful for this meeting. This group might form a team to plan the neighborhood organizational meeting.

Planning the First Neighborhood Meeting

Proper planning will ensure an organized, professional meeting. If you won't feel comfortable speaking in front of the group, ask your crime watch officer for help. He or she may be willing to conduct the entire meeting. The steps in planning the meeting that are still your responsibility are:

- Determine a convenient date for the meeting and schedule the date with your crime watch officer. Meetings are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. Usually six to eight weeks advance notice to the crime watch officer is appropriate.
- Discuss with the crime watch officer whether it might be beneficial to ask a beat officer or interactive community-policing officer to attend. These officers should be able to answer specific questions about crime activity in your area.
- Secure a convenient location for your meeting. The location can be a school, church, library, or recreation center. These types of facilities will usually offer a meeting room at no charge to the crime watch group. Be sure to make the arrangements several weeks in advance because available meeting rooms can be difficult to obtain at the last minute. Also be sure to clarify who will be responsible for set-up, clean up, and whether refreshments are allowed.
- If your neighborhood is small, meetings may be held in private residences, but allow adequate room for seating and ask neighbors to bring their own chairs if necessary.
- Design a simple notice announcing the meeting. Recruit volunteers to hand deliver an invitation to every home and business in the area at least two weeks prior to the meeting. You may want to ask neighbors to bring refreshments to the meeting.
- Flyers may be mailed if you have a list of all the addresses in the neighborhood, but do not place any flyers in mailboxes unless the appropriate

Meeting Topics/Speaker Ideas

A guest speaker at your meeting may help generate interest and attendance. If your neighborhood is experiencing a specific concern or has a special interest in a certain topic, an expert in that area may be just what you need. Several ideas for meeting topics and speakers are listed below.

<u>Topics</u>	<u>Possible Speakers</u>
Crime Prevention Programs (See complete list in Section VII)	DPD Crime Watch Officer DPD Community Policing Support Unit
Interactive Community Policing	DPD ICP Officer
Gang Awareness	DPD Gang Unit Officer
Juvenile Crime	Juvenile Court Judge Juvenile Division Assistant District Attorney DPD Youth and Family Crimes Officer
Home Security	DPD Crime Prevention Specialist Security Product Vendors Security Alarm Companies
Drug Awareness	DPD Officer from the Narcotics Unit
Self Defense Techniques	Dallas Recreation Center or YMCA
Child Safety	DPD McGruff Presentation Mental Health Association WHO Presentation
Driving Safety	DPD Texas Department of Public Safety
Volunteers in Patrol (VIP)	Crime Watch VIP Leader DPD Crime Watch Officer
Expanded Neighborhood Patrol (ENP)	Crime Watch ENP Leader DPD Crime Watch Officer
Crime Watch Voice Mail	Voice Mail Company Representative Crime Watch Leader DPD Crime Watch Officer
Fire Safety	Dallas Fire Department Representative
Careful Kids Program	DPD Crime Watch Officer
Composting	Local Nurseryman Texas A & M Extension Station
City Activities/Concerns	Council Member for your District City Department Representative

Additional Information

Most of the above speakers will speak to your group free of charge. Be sure to make arrangements a month or two in advance to assure availability. Many of the local not-for-profit organizations can provide a guest speaker in their area of interest. Check the blue pages of the telephone book.

Tips for Successful Meetings

The following suggestions have proven to be successful in many neighborhoods. It should be stressed that **every neighborhood is different** and you must pick and choose what you think will work best for your neighborhood. These suggestions may be tailored to fit the individual circumstances of your neighborhood.

General Guidelines

- **Determine a convenient date, time, and location** for your meeting far enough in advance to provide at least two weeks notice to neighbors.
- **Design an eye-catching meeting flyer** to be distributed to each home. Recruit volunteers to follow up with reminder calls a few days before the meeting.
- **Prepare a brief agenda** of information you want to cover at the meeting. If possible, distribute copies of the agenda to the attendees. Stick to the agenda.
- **Arrange your meeting room** in a comfortable configuration so that all attendees can see and hear speakers clearly.
- **Place sign-in sheets, name tags, and handouts at a table** near the entrance. Ask volunteers to welcome people and ensure that everyone signs in and picks up handouts.
- **Try to limit your meeting from 1 to 1 ½ hours.** Allot time for questions and answers. If you can't answer a question, write it down and follow up later.
- **Make introductions** of your core group, block captains, police officers, and any guest speakers. Briefly explain the responsibilities of each person.
- **Provide two or three names and telephone numbers of your core group** so that if people have questions later or decide to volunteer, they will know whom to contact.
- **Arrange refreshments in an inviting manner** if you plan a social period afterwards.

Some Suggestions

- **Ask attendees to fill out a 3"x5" card** with their name, address, telephone numbers, and willingness to serve in a crime watch position. These cards may be used later to develop block directories and volunteer lists.
- **Display a large neighborhood map.** Ask neighbors to place a dot at their place of residence on the map. Congratulate the street with the best attendance.
- **Pass out raffle tickets** before the meeting, and offer a door prize to the winner. Many local businesses and restaurants are willing to provide gift certificates.
- **Describe the various activities** in which your group might get involved and ask for input and suggestions from the neighbors. Alternately, distribute a questionnaire to be filled out and collected at the end of the meeting. Provide pens or pencils.
- **Ask neighborhood teens to volunteer to baby-sit** during the meeting if a nearby room can be used for this purpose. Ask for donations to pay the teens for their time.
- **Ask a leader from a nearby group** with a successful program in operation to answer questions from your neighbors if you are promoting a proposed activity such as voice mail, Volunteers in Patrol, or Expanded Neighborhood Patrol.
- **Ask an enthusiastic nearby crime watch chairperson to speak** about the positive effects of crime watch in his or her neighborhood.
- **Ask neighbors to break out in groups** by streets to meet each other and discuss the selection of block captains after the main business of the meeting.

**Chapter VI –
Crime Watch Activities/Tools
Crime Watch Signs**

Posting crime watch signs around the perimeter of a neighborhood helps to reinforce and strengthen the effect of a good crime watch organization. It sends a message to the criminal that the neighborhood is alert to suspicious activity. However, signs without enthusiastic participation reduce the effectiveness of the crime watch program. The city of Dallas authorizes only a standard design crime watch sign for use on public property. The detailed sign specifications follow.

Procedures

1. A “Request for Neighborhood Sign” application is included in this section. Fill in all of the requested information and attach a map of your area detailing each location where you want a crime watch sign installed. Mark the desired sign location on a hand drawn or Mapsco map of your area.
 - a) The Dallas Department of Transportation (DoT) will install your crime watch signs. The preferred location for the signs is on the back of your stop signs. If stop signs are not available, the signs may be installed on other street sign(s) or light poles, if the sign will meet the 7’ height requirement. The DoT will install your signs on existing poles at no charge. If you would like a crime watch sign(s) installed where there is no stop sign or existing pole, you must purchase the pole(s) from DoT. Hardware is included.
 - b) City Ordinance 17225 states that the sign will not be placed where it will interfere with traffic safety. Additionally, DoT will not install signs on utility poles, DART bus sign poles or private property. You may install crime watch signs on private property, such as fences at the entrances to alleys, only if you obtain the property owner’s permission.
2. Return your signed application and map to the crime watch officer at your DPD Substation. The name and address are listed in Section 1.
3. Your application will then be forwarded to the ICP Coordination Unit (ICPCU) for approval. If the map and information are complete, your application will then be forwarded to DoT Field Operations to process the installation of the signs.
4. You will be informed by ICPCU when your application is approved and you must then arrange to have your signs made. The sign specifications are shown on the following page.
5. When your signs are finished, you must pick up the signs from the vendor and deliver them to DoT Field Operations at 3204 Canton, Dallas, TX 75216. If you have any questions about the installation call DoT at the number listed in Section III.