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# Block Watch:

## Crime Prevention Made Simple

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### Goals of the Program

- ⌘ that families, especially children, will feel safe in their own homes and neighborhoods
- ⌘ that families will learn how easy and smart it is to be responsible for their own safety
- ⌘ that PTAs will help to teach families to be safe by offering training opportunities and resources
- ⌘ that citizens, law enforcement, and PTAs will work together to strengthen communities
- ⌘ that criminals will think twice before attempting to break the law in your neighborhood

**C**amaraderie, good communication, and reduced crime are things that most of us would like to see happen in our neighborhoods. The good news is that it can happen, a whole lot easier than most people think. The secret to successful neighborhoods, where crime has been lowered dramatically, is that they have learned to work positively and productively together with their neighbors and local law enforcement agency to form *Block Watch Associations*. Police and sheriffs' departments in cities, small towns, and suburbs throughout the country report substantial decreases in crime

due to local crime prevention efforts.

Block Watch is a practical, easy to operate neighborhood-based crime prevention program that works to build a sense of community and make a connection with neighbors. It is designed to empower citizens to reduce crime and the fear of crime. It is far more than a quick fix for an immediate crisis--it can be a moving force for positive changes that tackle root causes of crime. Block Watch Associations weave a tight social fabric and have a profound effect on the sense of community and the way people help each other. While the police department administers the program and helps it get

started, the program is totally dependent on neighbors to be successful.

It encourages citizens to *take back* their neighborhoods, streets, and communities by becoming vigilant, not vigilantes! It takes hard work, trust, and courage, but the law is on your side, and it works best when everyone with a stake in the neighborhood's health works together.

This publication will teach PTAs and their members how to form partnerships with their local police, businesses, and city government to drive crime from their neighborhoods through the use of *Block Watch* meetings and proven effective crime prevention strategies.

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### Washington State PTA

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Email: [wapta@wastatepta.org](mailto:wapta@wastatepta.org), Website: [www.wastatepta.org](http://www.wastatepta.org)

The Washington State PTA is attempting to bring you "Programs to Go!" which will feature various successful PTA programs for you to pick up and use if you choose. These programs will come to you already organized, with minimal work on your part. Look for more "Programs to Go!" ideas in upcoming general mailings. If you have program suggestions, please call the Washington State PTA office at (253) 565-2153 or 1-800-562-3804 or email to [wapta@wastatepta.org](mailto:wapta@wastatepta.org).

PROGRAMS TO GO!

# Block Watch is Neighbors Helping Neighbors

*Block Watch, Neighborhood Watch, Town Watch, Crime Watch — no matter what it's called, this is one of the most effective and least costly answers to crime. Watch groups are a foundation of community crime prevention, they can be a stepping stone to community revitalization*

Block Watch is a three-part neighbors-helping-neighbors program, which takes very little time, and no money. Residents are trained to recognize and report suspicious activities around their own and their neighbors' homes. Active Block Watch Associations have substantially reduced fear of crime, encouraged crime reporting, stimulated members' involvement in crime prevention, inhibited drug trafficking, and spurred beautification activities.

## **Part One: Getting to Know Your Neighbors**

At the Block Watch Meet-

ing a Captain and Co-Captain are elected by those attending the presentation from the neighborhood to serve as a liaison with the police. Captains are responsible for monitoring the engraver process, sharing crime prevention information with their neighbors as it becomes available, inviting new neighbors to join the program and for forwarding their names to their local police department. Block Watches thrive when at least one time per year they have a neighborhood get together. Plan an event such as a *National Night Out* Potluck Picnic, or an Ice Cream Social, etc. Be crea-

tive and have fun. Involve the children. Food seems to attract lots of people. Your local police department can often help you with invitations and fliers to use to promote your events. Some even help with barricading off your street the night of the event.

## **Part Two: Operation ID**

Engrave/mark at least 5-8 items in your home with an electric engraver with your driver's license number. Mark items, which are likely to be stolen, such as stereos, computers, televisions or microwaves, according to the way your police department teaches. Be sure to keep an inventory sheet as you go along. When the engraving is done residents are given Operation ID window stickers for their homes and signs are posted at the entrance of their block to deter would-be-criminals.

## **Part Three: Improving Physical Security of the Home**

Block Watch members will be given information that is practical and low-to-no cost on home security and are encouraged to improve the security of their homes as they see fit and as they can afford. Most of it is just common sense--and is as simple as learning how to trim the plants/shrubs surrounding your doors and windows.

## Crime Prevention Works No Matter Where You Live

### ***Crime-Free Multi-Housing***

The Crime-Free Multi-Housing program is a three-step program for rental properties (houses, apartments and condominiums). The goal is that property managers/owners will participate in all three steps to reach certification. The first step is the Landlord Training Program, the second is "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design" (CPTED) and the third and final step is starting a Block Watch program for your property.

### ***Landlord Training Program***

In the fall and spring of each year many departments offer the nationally recognized Landlord Training Program. This proven program, designed for property owners and managers, teaches legal and fair strategies regarding property management. The emphasis is placed on keeping illegal activity out of rental/multi-family properties. It covers everything from preparing the property to the role of the police. It also provides an excellent opportunity to begin networking with other landlords and property managers in an area. Call your local department to find out when the next class will be.

### ***Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design***

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is just what it sounds like. Designing out crime is the object. This can be achieved through better lighting, trimming overgrown bushes and shrubs, increased "natural surveillance" and an overall appearance of an "actively managed" property. An officer trained in CPTED principles will come to your property and conduct a CPTED survey. The dividends CPTED pays, for very little investment, are remarkable. A property that looks well cared for and maintained, in addition to the obvious benefit of being more valuable overall, is a natural draw to more desirable tenants. At the same time, it sends a clear message to criminals that the owners and residents of this property are "on the job". The criminal element is simply less likely to conduct illegal activity in the presence of citizens who are obviously not apathetic about the conditions of their homes and neighborhoods. Call to set an appointment to have your property inspected.

## Law Enforcement Resources

- ❖ Washington State Crime Prevention Association: [www.innswcpa.org](http://www.innswcpa.org)
- ❖ National Crime Prevention Council: [www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)
- ❖ National Night Out: [natw.org](http://natw.org), [www.nationaltownwatch.org](http://www.nationaltownwatch.org)
- ❖ McGruff: [www.mcgruff.com](http://www.mcgruff.com)

# Planning Your Program

*Residents are strongly encouraged to do the following:*

- 1) Call your local Police Department and ask if they have a Crime Prevention Officer or staff person that can schedule your first Block Watch meeting. They will come to your location to present the principles of Block Watch, and crime watch techniques. Most also do Apartment, Condo, and Business Block Watches (more about multi-housing programs later in this publication)
- 2) Go around your block and meet your neighbors, and invite them to a Block Watch meeting. Encourage them to join you in learning how to keep your neighborhood safe.
- 3) Get to know the police officers who patrol in your sector/neighborhood and help them by staying alert and vigilant. Invite them to your Block Watch meeting (with many programs the officer who patrols the neighborhood the meeting is held in, attends as part of the presentation to talk about the trends regarding crimes in your specific area).
- 4) Get involved. If you see an opportunity for crime, so will a criminal. Learn how to keep your home from becoming a crime scene by learning all you can about crime prevention.
- 5) Get all your valuables engraved and make sure that the engraving gun gets around to all your neighbors.
- 6) Celebrate your successes as a neighborhood and community—score one for the good guys this time!!!

## More Ways Police Departments and PTAs Can Reduce Crime

### *Crime Prevention Resources and Events*

For many police departments a very important aspect of the department's Community Policing philosophy is the sharing of crime prevention information and resources with the citizens it serves. In many areas, faithful **volunteers** can be found at many community events where they happily share the many free resources the department has to offer. Call your local police station to invite their volunteers, or a crime prevention officer to display items at your next PTA event.

### *Speaker's Bureau and Video Library*

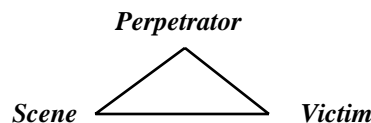
Another way the volunteers share their information is through their speaker's bureau and video library. Many house a wide variety of valuable presentation materials and videos. Topics may include: Children & Internet Safety, Crimes Against the Elderly, Identity Theft, Sexual Abuse Prevention, Are You Safe? National Crime Test. To access those resources, please call the crime prevention or volunteer office of your local police department, go online, or to your public library to find what you need.

### *Mobilizing Community Resources*

Community businesses and organizations offer numerous resources for crime prevention programs. Look to: religious institutions for meeting space, copying machines, and access to volunteers; service clubs and businesses for partnerships in fundraising initiatives; libraries for research materials, videos, computers, and meeting space; printing companies for free or discounted services for newsletters, fliers, and certificates; parent groups and labor unions for advice on organizing and recruiting volunteers; local media for publicity; and senior centers and schools for facilities and equipment.

## A Crime Scene

**The following three components make up a crime that, in turn, becomes a police report.**



**All three of these factors need to exist in order for a crime to occur. If you take away ONE of these factors, then you keep a crime from happening.**

Citizens have little control over the *perpetrators* of crime. However, they do have a *considerable* amount of control over the scene of the crime or whether they become a victim. In fact, citizens have more control over these two factors—*scene and victim*—than does the Police Department. Prevention is particularly effective on crimes against property. Crimes against property are 90% opportunity. Remove the opportunity or, at least, make the crime more difficult; then theft or burglary are less likely to occur

**Do your best not to provide opportunities for crime... do NOT be a willing victim.**

### *Neighborhood Speed Watch...*

*One of the most consistent complaints received by a police department is that of vehicles speeding through residential neighborhoods and other areas. Neighborhood Speed Watch is a public awareness program in which residents can take an active role in slowing down traffic on their street. Citizens can call their local police departments to see if they own a radar gun or the radar trailer with the digital display board that can be brought to their neighborhood. Many departments have trained volunteers who will bring the trailers to your area and operate the machine and do the data collection during the time requested. Many departments have them record the speeds and license plate numbers of any vehicle exceeding the speed limit. The registered owner of the speeding vehicle is then notified by letter of the violation. These letters do not constitute a notice of infraction, go on driving records or impose a fine. However, it is an important public awareness program and, in most cases, does have an effect. Just the appearance of the reader board displaying the speed will slow most drivers down. Give your department a call and ask about having this happen in your area today.*

# What Your PTA Can Do About Crime Prevention

*Here are strategies discovered by experienced Block Watch leaders:*

*☛ Spell out roles and responsibilities of the association and its members.*

*☛ Decentralize planning and work.*

*☛ Delegate tasks and establish standing committees.*

*☛ Keep in touch with members.*

*☛ Use personal contacts, in and outside of meetings.*

*☛ Distribute a newsletter to Communicate regularly with members.*

*☛ Plan for and train new leaders.*

*☛ Don't burnout existing ones.*

*☛ Mobilize collective resources and use them.*

*☛ Know members' skills and personal and business contacts.*

*☛ Be realistic about how many people you need to do a job.*

*☛ Use outside resources, such as government agencies and community-based organizations.*

*☛ Strike a balance between business and pleasure.*

*☛ Conduct business meetings on time and efficiently, but have a time for socializing before or after the meeting.*

*☛ Involve all elements in the community.*

- 1) Recruit an enthusiastic Safety chair to join your PTA board of directors:
  - a) Ask someone who has an interest and a passion for this topic—there is a lot of good information out there to be had and shared; the right person/team will have a lot of fun with this job.
  - b) Ask the chair and their committee/team to be creative in planning a variety of safety programs for your students, families, and staff. Keep track of what your plans call for in the way of funding needs and prepare a budget.
  - c) Ask your PTA board of directors to vote to allot the Safety Committee the money requested in their prepared budget, and vote to also make them a line item in the budget. Most of what you will do is tap into existing resources, so costs are usually kept low. Many publishers ONLY charge shipping and handling for their safety publications. Going online is an excellent way to find lots of good ideas and resources.
- 2) Have the chair contact your local police department and ask about their crime prevention programs.
  - a) Ask if they have a crime prevention officer or specific person assigned to crime prevention.
  - b) Ask them to tell you about what they have to offer in the way of crime prevention programs—for adults & kids.
  - c) Ask them their preferred methods of getting their resources to you and your students. Do they prefer classroom activities, or parent-child nighttime events, or both? A good plan has a little of both.
- 3) Talk to local police about their Block Watch Associations; tell them you are interested in getting some started in the neighborhoods surrounding your school.
  - a) Ask if they would hold a Block Watch Meeting in the school gym one night as a PTA sponsored program, so people can learn what they entail, and how easy they are to host, and how many valuable things there are to learn during a BW presentation. Be sure to add on the publicity/fliers that childcare is provided free, to attract people to attend.
  - b) Ask if the DARE officer is available to attend to provide a separate activity for the students/siblings.
  - c) Ask them to be ready at this meeting to sign people up for Block Watch forming meetings.
- 4) Be sure to find out about police Volunteer Programs:
  - a) Ask what kind of resources they have available (such as: people-power, McGruff @/kid stuff, videos, publications, training, etc.)
  - b) Ask if their volunteers are available to bring their resources to PTA events.
  - c) Ask about their program needs and find out how you can help—either through donations of materials and money, and/or through your volunteer time. Partner with the volunteers and the school to hold a Safety (Resource) Fair. Invite the local police, fire, city hall, businesses, etc., to set up tables of resources to share and invite families to attend. The safer families learn how to be, the safer kids feel and act.
- 5) Partner with the police department and host Neighborhood Summits in all your district schools.
  - a) Ask if the Chief of Police will come and update you on the health of your neighborhood and ask for your input.
  - b) Ask them to show how the city is broken down for patrolling and what the current crime stats are in each area.
  - c) Ask if the volunteers will come with their resources—especially items for kids—and share what they do.
  - d) Ask city officials/policy makers to attend.
  - e) Ask city hall for help with addresses for mailing invitations to the Summit.
- 6) Partner with other PTAs and agencies in your area to provide health and safety information to your community.
  - a) Ask your council to chair a Safety Fair committee using local units as the committee members.
  - b) Ask other local agencies to join you in your planning and efforts—esp. Parks & Recreation Departments, YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, etc.
  - c) Ask to use a central school in the district for your event, to draw the most people from all around. Get local businesses to help with food, drinks, and incentives for attendees.