

# EYES ON YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



## NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH PROGRAM

A program involving the joint efforts of the Pinecrest Police Department and the community - designed to enhance neighborhood security, heighten the community's power of observation and to encourage mutual assistance and concern among neighbors.

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## What is Neighborhood Crime Watch?

- Neighborhood Crime Watch is a crime prevention program which enlists the active participation of residents in cooperation with the Pinecrest Police Department to prevent and reduce crime in their community.
- Neighborhood Crime Watch is residents not only knowing each other, but taking the time to care about each other and work together in a program of mutual assistance.
- Neighborhood Crime Watch is about crime prevention education and implementation of important home and personal security strategies.

## The Importance of Neighborhood Crime Watch

Crime and fear of crime threatens a community's well-being, people become afraid to use their streets and parks. Suspicion erupts between young and old. Crime in turn feeds on the isolation it creates. Neighborhoods consist of many different homes, in some both parents work, some are single-parent families and some must travel frequently due to work. All of these factors can contribute to community isolation and weaken civic ties.

In recent years, neighborhoods have experienced rapid change. The old, well established neighborhoods have been replaced by a highly transient, growing community where people seek more and more privacy. This lifestyle tends to promote unfamiliarity with neighbors and a corresponding lack of concern. Unfortunately, this enhances the opportunities for the criminal element and increases the community's vulnerability to crime.

Members of Neighborhood Crime Watch can be the eyes and ears of the police department in a designated area. It has been shown in communities where there is a strong bond between neighbors that the crime rate can be reduced by as much as 56%. Their participation is vital for the success of this program. Neighborhood Crime Watch is one of the most effective and least costly answers to crime. Watch groups are the foundation of a community's effort to prevent criminal activity in their area. They can be a stepping stone to community revitalization.

The Pinecrest Police Department is committed to assist in your efforts to make your community a safer and more pleasant place to live. We will provide you with the tools you will need to successfully manage your Neighborhood Crime Watch group.

# Getting Started

The first step is getting organized!

- Form a small planning committee of neighbors to discuss needs, assess the level of interest, possible challenges and the Neighborhood Crime Watch concept.
- Contact the Pinecrest Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit to discuss the program and your local crime problems. An initial meeting will be scheduled at that time.
- Select a meeting place that is accessible to people with disabilities.
- Publicize your meeting at least one week in advance with door-to-door fliers and follow up with phone calls the day before your meeting.
- The objective of an initial community meeting is to gauge neighbor's interest, establish purpose of a crime watch program and begin to identify issues that need to be addressed.

At your community's first meeting you can expect to:

- Elect a chairperson that can serve as a liaison between the neighborhood and the police. The chairperson should not be a member of the Home Owners Association/committee.
- Ask for block captain volunteers who will be responsible for relaying information to members in their block, keeping up-to-date information on residents and making special efforts to involve the elderly, working parents and young people. They should communicate information about meetings and crime incidents to all residents.
- Ask for block watchers to cooperate and assist the block captain, check neighbors' homes when out of town, act as eyes and ears for the neighbors and report any suspicious activity ("window watcher").
- Establish a regular means of communication with Neighborhood Crime Watch members such as e-mail, telephone tree, newsletter, etc.
- Prepare a neighborhood map showing names, addresses and phone numbers of participating households and distribute to all members. Block captains keep this map up to date, contacting newcomers to the neighborhood and rechecking occasionally with ongoing participants.

With guidance from a Pinecrest Crime Prevention Practitioner, this program can provide training for its members in home and personal security techniques, observation skills and crime reporting. Residents will also learn about the types of crimes that are affecting their area.

Neighborhood Crime Watch signs will be distributed by the Pinecrest Police Department once your group is organized. Eligibility requirements such as number of houses/units participating in the program, number of meetings attended (at least one every year) and assuring that member assignments are satisfied must first be met. The number of signs that will be placed in each community will be determined by the size of the neighborhood.

## Objective of the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program

The main objective of the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program is to reduce the incidence of crime by:

- Increasing citizen's awareness of burglary and other neighborhood crime through a continuing information program.
- Training citizens in the means of better property security and assisting them in making their properties more secure.
- Developing a neighborhood action plan where neighbors help watch each other's properties and report suspicious persons and activities to the police department. •
- The goal - 100% participation!

What Neighborhood Crime Watch will do for your neighborhood?

- Increase immediate reporting of crime or suspicious activity.
- Decrease crime in the area.
- Train residents to be observant and how to properly report what they see.
- Bring the community together in a combined effort to positively affect their community.

What Neighborhood Crime Watch will not do?

- It will not guarantee that there will be no crime in your neighborhood.
- It does not empower its members as law enforcement officers.
- It is not designed to be used to settle Homeowner Association or other community civil issues.

*The Village of Pinecrest Neighborhood Crime Watch Program is sponsored by the Pinecrest Police Department and Approved by the National Crime Prevention Council.*

## Tips for Success

- Work with the police department. It is critical to a watch group's credibility and is the source of necessary information and training.
- Hold regular meetings to help residents get to know each other and to decide upon program strategies and activities.
- Consider linking with an existing organization, such as a citizens' association, community development office, tenants' association, or housing authority. They may be able to provide an existing infrastructure you can use.
- Canvass door-to-door to recruit members.
- Ask people who seldom leave their homes to be "window watchers" and look out and report any unusual activities in the neighborhood.
- Translate crime and drug prevention materials into Spanish or other languages needed by non-English speakers in your community. If necessary, have a translator at meetings.
- Gather the facts about crime in your neighborhood. Check police reports, conduct victimization surveys and learn residents' perceptions about crimes. Often, residents' opinions are not supported by facts and accurate information can reduce the fear of crime.
- Physical conditions like abandoned cars or overgrown vacant lots contribute to crime. Sponsor cleanups, encourage residents to beautify the area and ask them to turn on outdoor lights at night.
- Start a block parent program to help children cope with emergencies while walking to and from school or playing in the area.
- Emphasize that watch groups are not vigilantes and should not assume the role of the police. Their duty is to ask neighbors to be alert, observant, and caring - and to report suspicious activity or crimes immediately to the police.

