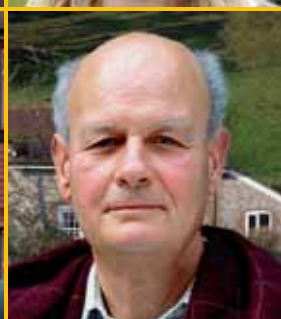


Neighbourhood or Home Watch:  
**COMMUNITY ACTION  
AGAINST CRIME**



# WELCOME TO YOUR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD OR HOME WATCH SCHEME

Wherever you live, you are part of a community. It may be large or small, in a town or in the country. It might be a housing estate, a rural village, a block of flats, a suburban road or a seaside resort. Unfortunately, regardless of its size, your community may experience crime.

It's easy to shrug it off and assume that it won't happen to you or that nothing can be done. In fact, a great deal can be done to prevent crime. But the police cannot do it alone. Each of us has a vital role to play by becoming actively involved in crime prevention. Residents of a community possess a very specialised knowledge of their neighbourhood which even the local Police Community Support Officer or Neighbourhood Police Officer may find hard to achieve. A police officer might not recognise someone in your garden as a stranger but your neighbour might. It is this kind of awareness and willingness to help that is the basis of Neighbourhood Watch or Home Watch.

By letting police know of anything suspicious you see or hear, you are helping to reduce the opportunities for crime to occur. The more difficult it can be made for criminals, the more likely it is that crime can be reduced.

## WHAT IS NEIGHBOURHOOD OR HOME WATCH?

Neighbourhood Watch, sometimes known as Home Watch, is one of the biggest and most successful crime prevention initiatives ever. Behind it lies a simple idea, and a central value shared by millions of people around the country, that getting together with your neighbours to take action can cut local crime and that Neighbourhood Watch can create a better place to live, work and play. Neighbourhood Watch is not just about reducing burglary figures – it's about creating communities that care. It brings local people together and can make a real contribution to improving their lives. The activity of Watch members can foster a new community spirit and a belief in the community's ability to tackle problems. At the same time, you feel secure, knowing your neighbours are keeping an eye on your property.

There are other benefits to Neighbourhood Watch schemes too. You could become familiar with crime prevention ideas that will help



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keep your home and belongings safe. And the extra security that belonging to a Neighbourhood Watch scheme offers might even mean that you can get a premium discount from your insurance company.



**MOST CRIME IS  
OPPORTUNISTIC,  
COMMITTED ON  
THE SPUR OF  
THE MOMENT**

## **HOW DOES A WATCH SCHEME WORK?**

### **Helping yourself by helping others**

Before going on holiday, many people ask their neighbours to keep an eye on their homes while they are away. But just consider how much more confident you would feel if you knew that you and your neighbours were looking after each other's homes throughout the year. This is what Neighbourhood Watch means.

Going to work, to the shops, out for an evening or away for a weekend – you would be able to enjoy that sense of security and peace of mind because a Watch scheme operates in your area.

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD OR HOME WATCH BELONG TO THE COMMUNITY**

Watch schemes belong to the community, so firstly the residents must decide that they want to begin and maintain a scheme. The police may suggest that a scheme is started. In either case the police will be



pleased to advise on its setting up. With the support of the majority of residents, Watch schemes can operate successfully in many types of community.

Neighbourhood Watch schemes can be large, covering, for example, most of the households on an estate, or they might involve just half a dozen houses. It depends on the area and what people living there want.

A scheme is generally led by a volunteer co-ordinator whose job is to get people working together and make sure things get done. As well as the co-ordinator, there is sometimes a committee. Committees meet regularly to plan which problems to target and what action to take. Schemes should keep in close touch with local police to share information and advice.

Most schemes have one or more co-ordinators. They are people who receive information from other residents about anything suspicious they may have seen or heard, and then pass it on to the police. Of course, should anyone spot anything that needs immediate police attention, for example someone trying to break in to a car or home, they should still dial 999.

## THE AIMS OF WATCH SCHEMES

- To reduce local opportunities for crime, thereby deterring would-be thieves and vandals.
- To establish a community spirit so that everyone can contribute towards the protection of their property by mutual co-operation and communication.
- To inform the co-ordinator or the police of any suspicious activity.

Members of Watch schemes are not vigilantes. Patrolling the streets is a job for the police; they will act on the information supplied by residents. But if you want to help the police in the most direct and practical way of all, why not volunteer to be a Special Constable. You can obtain details from your local police station.

### **... and the advantages**

Once a Watch scheme is operating successfully, the advantages to the community are obvious:

- The results of Watch schemes already established show that they

can help to reduce local crime such as burglary, vandalism, car thefts and thefts from cars.

- A better community spirit can be created.
- Suspicious strangers waiting outside schools, in parks and playgrounds where children congregate can be quickly reported to the police.
- Crime prevention advice can be quickly and efficiently circulated throughout the community.

Watch schemes lead to greater shared awareness of the problems in your community and to a better understanding of the practical steps that can be taken to tackle these.

## WHAT CAN WATCH SCHEMES DO?

They can target local crime problems and take action to prevent them. Schemes should find out from local people what most concerns them and focus on a specific problem. Your local Neighbourhood Policing Team is able to provide information about local problems and what is being done to tackle them.

These are the key steps to targeting and reducing crime and the fear of crime in an area. In consultation with your local police:

- get a picture of local crime
- target crimes you can have a real impact on
- identify and prevent opportunities for crime
- form an action plan to tackle the problem
- block or reduce opportunities for criminals.

Most crime is opportunistic, committed on the spur of the moment, or when a car or house is left unlocked. This means there is enormous scope for reducing chances for criminals.

Traditional Neighbourhood Watch activity has focused on the immediate vicinity of homes, with members looking out for anything suspicious, or helping their neighbours as necessary. However, more and more schemes are broadening their range of work.

Targeting local problems such as vandalism or graffiti are well within the scope of a well organised Watch scheme. You may be able to take action yourselves, such as fitting more secure door or window locks in vulnerable homes, or you may need to get others involved. This could mean lobbying the Local Authority or



SCHEMES CAN BE LARGE, COVERING, FOR EXAMPLE, MOST OF THE HOUSEHOLDS ON AN ESTATE, OR THEY MIGHT INVOLVE JUST HALF A DOZEN HOUSES



Local Strategic Partnership, for example, to improve the street lighting on your estate or to step up the security of a communal entrance.

Many schemes now work in partnership with other agencies like Victim Support, Help the Aged and Age Concern to help reduce the fear of crime.

### Repeat burglaries

When a home is burgled it is more likely to be burgled again than a home that hasn't been. If it does happen it is likely to be within the next few weeks. After all, a burglar has been into the home, found the weak points in its security and had a good look at the contents and layout. So stepping up the security of a burgled home straight away can prevent a further crime.

Neighbourhood Watch schemes can tackle this problem by keeping an extra watch over recently burgled homes. Immediate neighbours are asked to keep an eye on the targeted home, to be especially watchful for a few weeks and to report anything suspicious to the police. Where this has been set up following a burglary, it can have a dramatic impact in preventing another crime in the high risk period.

The key is to:

- respond fast
- get all neighbours who overlook the burgled property to help
- be extra vigilant for a few weeks.



**SCHEME  
MEMBERS  
CAN ALSO  
LOBBY THE  
BUSINESS  
COMMUNITY  
TO TAKE PART**





Watch schemes do more than just watch out for criminals. Some schemes provide services for elderly or vulnerable neighbours, such as providing transport, or acting as a nominated neighbour.

## AN ACTIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE POLICE

Watch schemes are not police-run groups. But to be truly effective against crime, they need to plan action in co-operation with the police (or other agency such as the Local Authority).

It is essential to establish a close working relationship with your local police such as your Neighbourhood Watch liaison officer and/or the Neighbourhood Policing Team, and to share with them all information relating to crime and other incidents in your area. Many police stations have volunteer administrators who, in conjunction with the police, act as a liaison point for Watch co-ordinators. The police can provide up-to-date crime figures and other information as well as expert advice, while Watch members, Local Authorities and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships can contribute valuable grassroots information about the area. When you team this local knowledge with the sort of statistical information and operational support the police can often provide, then you have a powerful basis for action against crime.

Successful schemes have vital factors in common that help them keep on top of local crime. They:

- improve communication between police and residents
- encourage security awareness and an effective crime response
- create a better community spirit with neighbours looking out for one another.

Scheme members can also lobby the business community to play a part, for example persuading local businesses to organise a raffle to fund personal attack alarms for pensioners. Apart from reducing crime, such improvements contribute to the general quality of life in the area. It's all about listening to people's needs and then rounding up support locally to see what can be done.

Neighbourhood Watch members want to know their hard work is paying off – and the police can provide that evidence in the form of crime statistics. There's nothing more satisfying to a Watch scheme than to see the hard evidence of a reduction in crime showing up in local figures.

## Regional and national support

Schemes need never feel they are struggling alone. There are thousands of others all around the country with good ideas and sources of support. Most areas feed into regional and national structures.

Local associations help schemes to:

- exchange good ideas
- share information
- build up knowledge of best practice
- support and help one another locally.

## HOW TO MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY MORE SECURE

By being a good neighbour and keeping an eye out for anything suspicious you can help to make your community more secure. These are some of the things you should report:

- Strangers knocking on front doors or peering through windows and then disappearing round the back, or loitering suspiciously.
- Strangers hanging around schools, playing fields etc and approaching children.
- Open windows in houses where the owners are out or on holiday.
- Strangers trying car doors.
- Anything that you believe is suspicious.

**Details are important** – whenever you pass on information, remember that accurate descriptions of suspicious people and vehicles will save time and confusion.

This is the information the police may need:

- an exact description of what you have seen
- the time
- the place
- the person(s) involved: approximate age, sex, colour, height, build, unusual characteristics, clothing worn, and any other distinguishing features
- the vehicles involved: registration number (even part of this number might help), make and model (if known), colour, condition and direction of travel.

Incident Report Cards are available from your Neighbourhood Watch liaison officer.

### Crime prevention advice

Advice on crime prevention and security is available from your Crime Reduction Office, Safer Neighbourhood Team or Neighbourhood Policing Team at your local police station.

### HOW CAN I SET UP A SCHEME?

If you want to get involved in a Watch scheme and find out about schemes and how they operate, your local police will tell you if there is a scheme in your area or help you set up one of your own.

To find your neighbourhood policing team visit [www.direct.gov.uk/neighbourhoodpolicing](http://www.direct.gov.uk/neighbourhoodpolicing)

### MORE INFORMATION

For general crime reduction advice visit [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk) and [www.crimereduction.gov.uk](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk)

Publications for schemes and general crime prevention advice are available at:

[www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/publicity\\_catalogue](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/publicity_catalogue)

