

## Get Started

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Don't have a neighborhood watch yet? You can be the one to take that first step and talk to your neighbors about the crime concerns in your area.

With a bit of time, effort and cooperation its quite easy to get a neighborhood watch going. The key is taking that first step.

1. **Share the idea with your neighbors and assess their interest.** Offer the benefits of a watch group and provide relevant crime data and reports. Consider distributing a survey to gauge concerns and interest. Those who express immediate interest could be recruited as core members.
2. **Request a visit from a Deputy.\*** Contact the Sheriff's Office to let them know that you want to start a group and have a Deputy stop by. You'll then set a time when he or she can meet with your neighbors to discuss the particular crime concerns in your area. Call 320.259.3700.  
  
*\*If you live in a city, you should contact your local police department.*
3. **Formalize your group and register it with the national neighborhood watch program** at [USAonWatch.org](http://USAonWatch.org). This will allow law enforcement and others to see that you are coming together to help prevent crime in your neighborhood.

## What is Neighborhood Watch?

A watchful neighborhood is key to preventing crime because many criminals are discouraged if they might be observed. Information that you or your neighbors give the police about suspicious activities can result in quicker and more successful solutions.

The benefits of starting a Neighborhood Watch include:

- Reduced crime and better quality of life
- Greater sense of security and community
- Better preparation for emergencies
- Greater support for law enforcement

Neighborhood Watch is about knowing your neighbors, staying observant and reporting suspicious or illegal activity.

**It is NOT about taking the law into your own hands or forming a vigilante justice group.**

Neighborhood Watch can work well in an apartment building, a rural area, or a business park, just as in an area of single-family homes.

To launch a new group, follow the steps outlined here and tailor them to meet your neighborhood's unique needs.

Helpful resources are available from:

- Stearns County ([co.stearns.mn.us](http://co.stearns.mn.us))
- National Crime Prevention Council ([ncpc.org](http://ncpc.org))
- National Sheriffs' Association Neighborhood Watch Program ([usaonwatch.org](http://usaonwatch.org))

# Neighborhood Watch

*The crime prevention steps that you and your neighbors take as a group are just as important as the things you do individually.*

*In fact, widespread participation will make your individual efforts even more effective.*



Stearns County Sheriff's Office  
320.259.3700  
[sheriff@co.stearns.mn.us](mailto:sheriff@co.stearns.mn.us)

## Get Organized



This is where a little effort can go a long way. Structuring the group early on will help future projects and activities run smooth. Also, organizing will ensure that this is a group effort and you won't be working alone.

1. **Determine your group's leadership structure.** Who are the "core" members? Will there be an individual coordinator or a team? Is the group large enough to divide into blocks with captains? Will you have a liaison from the Sheriff's Office?
2. **Establish communication channels.** What is the group's preferred method of meeting and communication? Offline with in-person meetings, a phone tree, and newsletter? Or online using email, a website and social media? Online is convenient and you don't all have to be present at the same time. However offline meetings allow you to see each other more and build relationships.
3. **Create a detailed neighborhood map.** This visual aid is a good idea in case you need to call someone with a specific report or for any kind of emergency. The map should include labels for streets, homes and landmarks. Also include residents' names and note if they hold a Neighborhood Watch role.
4. **Discuss your topics of concern and determine the group's goals.** Be sure to assess available resources and set priorities. Then develop a strategy for

reaching the goals. The plan should include informing everyone of good home security practices and watching out for suspicious or unusual activities.

5. **Schedule regular meetings** to address crime prevention, community policing topics and the group's progress. The meeting schedule will depend on if your group gathers online, offline or a combination of the two.

## Get Active



Now you're ready to implement your new plans. Hold a Kickoff event to promote the group and distribute resources like the map, phone tree and plans. Continue to share reports, news and progress through meetings and other communications.

1. **Meetings should be engaging.** If it's an in-person gathering, plan it to be fun, short and productive. Invite the neighbors and figure out logistics (location, availability) and the agenda. Keep it short and sweet; facilitate discussions to keep them moving. If you hold an online meeting, invite participation, post interesting topics and keep it active.
2. **Trainings are an important part of Neighborhood Watch.** Core trainings include improving observation skills, defining suspicious activity, and reporting incidents to law enforcement. Also consider holding safety training sessions like fire prevention, first aid or home security.
3. **Improvement Projects build a sense of community and pride.** Perhaps there's an area cluttered with junk that needs to be cleaned up, a public garden that needs attention, or a shared space that could use some art.
4. **Observe national events** such as *National Night Out* in August, *National Preparedness Month* in September or *Crime Prevention Month* in October. Hold a potluck or picnic in your yard or a nearby park.
5. **Conduct Hot Topic seminars.** These can be held online or offline. Topics include identity theft, vandalism, burglary and anything important to your particular group. You can also hold seminars geared toward special audiences like kids, teens or seniors.
6. **Build partnerships** with local businesses, schools, churches, or clinics. These partners may be willing to provide resources or help with training and seminars.
7. **Expand your group's role.** If your group is up and running successfully and you want to go to the next level, consider involvement in local citizen groups. Help with Emergency Preparedness, assist with information sharing and preparing emergency kits. Help Homeland Security through programs like See Something Say Something, or learning about evacuation plans, shelters and local warning systems.