



Stafford County

# NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Crime Prevention Guide

*Stafford County: A Certified Business Community*



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# CRIME SOLVERS

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**Sheriff David P. Decatur, Jr.**  
**Stafford County Sheriff's Office**  
A State Accredited Law Enforcement Agency



Dear Community Partner,

The Stafford County Sheriff's Office is actively reaching out to neighborhoods so that together we can fight crime and help you and your community feel safe.

We are a progressive and professional Sheriff's Office. Our number one priority is crime prevention, but we cannot accomplish the job alone.

This manual is intended to assist you in reducing crime and to give you guidance should a crime happen to you or to members of your community.

It is in no way intended to dictate what your policies should be. However, we hope that the information contained in this manual will be of use to you in your effort to put crime prevention to work for you.

Sincerely,

David P. Decatur, Jr.  
Sheriff

1225 Courthouse Road  
Stafford, VA 22554

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 189  
Stafford, VA 22555-0189

Office: (540) 658-4450  
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[www.co.stafford.va.us/sheriff](http://www.co.stafford.va.us/sheriff)

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# Neighborhood Watch-Crime Prevention Guide

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## **Neighborhood Watch Program**

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program involving the joint efforts of the Stafford County Sheriff's Office and the community. It is designed to encourage the active participation of citizens, in cooperation with the Sheriff's Office, to enhance neighborhood security and to encourage mutual assistance and concern among neighbors. Neighborhoods have changed greatly over recent years. Communities are highly transient, with citizens seeking more and more privacy. The connection between neighbors and communities has been lost. Neighborhood Watch is an organized program that tries to rebuild this connection. It encourages neighbors to look out for each other and to take pride in their communities.

This booklet has been designed to assist the citizens of Stafford County in setting up Neighborhood Watch programs. The various points discussed are offered as suggestions on how a Neighborhood Watch program might be established. The extent of neighborhood problems and the commitment by neighborhood residents will determine which of the suggestions should be adopted.

The goal of Neighborhood Watch is to reduce crime and the fear of crime through the following objectives:

- Encourage citizens to be proactive regarding crime prevention
- Encourage neighbors to look out for each other
- Increase awareness of neighborhood crime
- Increase home security
- Active surveillance of neighborhood by residents
- Encourage all neighbors to report crime and suspicious situations
- Participation in Neighborhood Watch crime prevention tactics, such as Address Display, Operation Identification, and Operation Night Light

# CRIME FOLLOWS THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

THE CRIME RISK TRIANGLE illustrates the three basic elements necessary for a crime to occur. It takes a criminal with the **DESIRE** and the **ABILITY** to commit a crime, and a victim who provides the **OPPORTUNITY** for the criminal act:

## Crime Prevention Triangle

**“The anticipation, recognition, and appraisal of a crime risk and the initiation of some action to remove or reduce it.”**



Crimes against persons are crimes of opportunity. If you minimize opportunity, which is the easier of the three elements to control, then you will minimize your losses due to crime. On the other hand, *IF YOU MAKE IT EASY TO STEAL FROM YOU, SOMEONE WILL DO SO. DON'T MAKE IT EASY; MAKE IT DIFFICULT, RISKY AND UNREWARDING.*

Criminal activity tends to occur against “softer,” easier targets where the potential for gain is greater and the risk of apprehension is smaller.



# How to Create a Neighborhood Watch Program

- I. Call several neighbors together and form a planning committee
- II. Determine the area to be included and prepare block maps to help organize your group
- III. Select the Watch Coordinator and Block Captains
  - A. Duties of the Watch Coordinator
    1. Act as the liaison between the Sheriff's Office and the Block Captains
    2. Assist the Sheriff's Office by disseminating information to the Block Captains
    3. Attend Neighborhood Watch meetings held by the Stafford County Sheriff's Office in the Public Safety Building
    4. Coordinate the activities of the Block Captains
    5. Maintain a master list of all Watch members
    6. Strive to get 100% participation in the Address Display, Operation Identification, and Operation Night Light programs
  - B. Duties of the Block Captains
    1. Act as the liaison between the Coordinator and the Neighbors
    2. Assist the Coordinator by disseminating information to the neighbors
    3. Recruit new Watch members
    4. Assist the Watch Coordinator in planning and conducting Watch meetings (we recommend that watch groups meet at least quarterly)
    5. Prepare and maintain a Data Sheet for each family involved in the Watch on their block for Block Captain's records
    6. Prepare and maintain a telephone/e-mail contact sheet to disseminate information to watch members in case of emergency
    7. Make sure each member has an accurate copy of the block map
    8. Coordinate the efforts of the neighbors on their block



- IV. Schedule a meeting between the Coordinator and Block Captains
  - A. Select a suitable meeting place
  - B. Invite all interested neighbors to attend
  - C. Use this manual as a lesson plan for the meeting
  - D. Designate someone to take minutes to be made available to the neighbors who are unable to attend
- V. Establish a regular meeting schedule for the Watch Coordinator and Block Captains to discuss neighborhood problems and plan neighborhood watch activities
- VI. Contact the Stafford County Sheriff's Office-Crime Prevention Unit to submit the Neighborhood Watch Coordinator's contact information and register your Neighborhood Watch
- VII. Install Neighborhood Watch signs to warn criminals to stay away. (Information about placement of these signs will be provided when your Neighborhood Watch becomes active.)

# **Role of the Neighborhood Watch**

1. Maintain a cooperative system of surveillance over your neighborhood's property and residents
2. Promptly and accurately report crimes and suspicious persons/activities to the Stafford County Sheriff's Office
3. Assist and encourage all neighbors to participate in Crime Prevention Programs such as:
  - Address Display
  - Operation Identification
  - Operation Night Light
  - Home Security Surveys
4. Maintain a continuing communication system between neighborhood residents
5. Start a Neighborhood Newsletter or web page
6. Encourage all neighbors to get involved in neighborhood matters

## **Role of the Stafford County Sheriff's Office**

1. To notify the Coordinators of any crime trend that may threaten the neighborhoods
2. To respond to specific questions or requests for information from the Watch groups
3. To provide crime prevention information to the Watch
4. To provide programs for group members to attend, on topics such as; identity fraud; larceny from autos, and personal safety
5. To work with coordinators to register National Night Out events

# How to Observe Suspicious Activity

Observation, looking out for each other, happens through diligent practices. Suspicious activities can be observed by seeing, hearing or smelling out of the ordinary happenings.

Here are 10 good tips on how to observe:

1. **Trust Your Judgement:** Recognize and understand what you are observing. Practice observations techniques. As you understand what is happening, make your judgment calls. Recognize when to call for help. If your judgment (instinct) tells you something is not right CALL IMMEDIATELY-DON'T HESITATE!
2. **At Home:** Observe from your home. Whether you live in a house, a mobile home, an apartment or a condominium, you are the one to determine which locations are best for observing normal and suspicious activity. Ideal locations for observing include, but are not limited to all areas surrounding your property like windows, doors and garden areas.
3. **Practice:** Practice. Practice. Practice. Like any technique, practice makes perfect. Use your head to assimilate all you are exposed to and evaluate what you see and hear. No athlete, no pilot, no book-keeper, not anyone, can perform up to their utmost without practice. You will learn a great deal in your Neighborhood Watch training. Practice what you learn.
4. **Knowledge:** By knowing who belongs in each house, their hours of work, their automobiles, helpers who come into their homes regularly, you can observe what is happening in your neighborhood and easily become suspicious of anything that does not fit your neighbor's habits.

5. **Secrecy:** If something suspicious is happening, look out for your neighbor. Use your senses and call the Stafford County Sheriff's Office. Remember, you are not the strong arm of the law. Don't confront a suspect – call the Stafford County Sheriff's Office.
6. **Vehicle or Bicycle:** Observe by vehicle or bicycle. You must rely on your knowledge of Suspicious Activities, Sounds and Smells. Practice what is needed to report a Suspect Vehicle or Person. Practice license number memorization, be alert and be prepared to call the Stafford County Sheriff's Office if you recognize anything suspicious.
7. **On Foot:** Observe on foot as you walk or jog through your neighborhood. Memorize the check lists of Suspicious Activities and Sounds. Be alert to anything unusual happening in your neighborhood. Know your neighbors and your neighborhood.
8. **Be Prepared:** Prepare yourself by having binoculars. These are especially useful in rural and low lit areas. A cellular phone will be useful in some areas, a CB or radio in others. If you are patrolling, which many Neighborhood Watch groups do, these are especially important.
9. **At Night:** Observe at night by looking around the periphery of the subject. Look in all directions high and low and both sides of your subject and your view will be sharper. Also, prepare yourself by having a small, powerful flashlight, if you need to use it without arousing suspicion.
10. **Recorded Notes:** The written or recorded word, with dates and times noted as the events occur (contemporaneously), is crucial to your reporting and following up on the criminal activities of any suspects. Your memory is clear when you note, immediately, what you see, logging the time of your notes. If you remember something else later, note it also, with the time. Make notes of anything you might feel is important to report to the Stafford County Sheriff's Office. Use a cell phone as a recorder or make notes on paper. Remember to have a cell phone charger nearby and something to write with.

# Recognizing Suspicious Activity

**Slow moving vehicle without lights on at night:**

May be casing the neighborhood or tracking a victim.

**A parked, occupied vehicle unusual to the neighborhood:**

May be casing the neighborhood, operating as a point for drug dealing, a sexual deviate or child molester waiting for their target, being a get-away car.

**Vehicle being loaded with valuables if parked by closed business or unoccupied house:** Possible burglary in progress.

**An unattended vehicle with the motor on:**

May be someone is, or has, committed a burglary or robbery.

**Leaving a location at night and has their lights off:**

Possible robber, assault violation or burglar.

**Problems driving their vehicle, especially if it is an expensive model:**

Possible stolen vehicle or the driver is driving under the influence or drug impaired.

**The vehicle is abandoned or in a bad condition, with signs of being in an accident:**

Could be involved in drive-by shooting or a hit and run accident.

**An over-loaded vehicle that is heavily weighted down, parked, or traveling in your neighborhood:**

Possible burglar.

**Persons detaching mechanical parts or accessories from vehicle:**

Possible theft or vandalism in progress.

**Abandoned vehicle parked on block:**

Possible stolen vehicle.

**Someone being forced into a vehicle:**

Possible kidnapping, assault or attempted rape.

# Recognizing Suspicious Activity

## Through Sounds

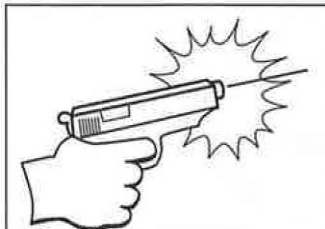
Your senses to detect suspicious activities are very helpful in combatting crime. Sounds may only last a few seconds and may go undetected. Here are some sounds which require close attention, and reporting:



**CRIES FOR HELP:** Screaming for help is precisely what you hear. Act on it find out where the screams are coming from and immediately call the Sheriff's Office. Heroes can be wounded or killed. Remember that apprehension is the job of the Sheriff's Office.

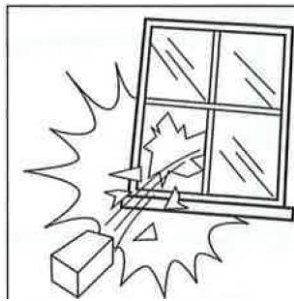
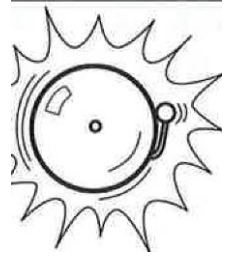
**CONTINUOUS SCREAMING:** This type of screaming probably is a result of someone being hurt or mistreated. Especially listen for victims cries. Quickly try to determine the location, source and nature of the scream and immediately call the Sheriff's Office.

**SCREAMING AND CURSING:** This type of screaming is probably a domestic violence incident between husband and wife, parent and child, two people who are intent on hurting each other but not in a life-threatening way. Determine the location, source and nature of the scream and call the Sheriff's Office.



**GUNFIRE:** Immediately call the police or sheriff. Provide as much information as to the number of shots and their source (location) Important to note if there are multiple shooters and/or automatic weapons involved.

**ALARMS ACTIVATED:** Determine the location, source and nature of the alarm and call the Sheriff's Office.



**BREAKING GLASS:** If you hear the sound of breaking glass, immediately call the Sheriff's Office. This can mean someone is breaking into a dwelling or store.

**MUSIC THAT IS LOUD:** Loud music may be used to mask other unlawful activities. If you hear loud music covering the cry of a screaming person, immediately call the Sheriff's Office.



**UNUSUAL SOUNDS:** If you hear some unusual sounds, you should determine the location, source and nature of the sounds, and if you are suspicious, immediately call the Sheriff's Office.



**DOGS BARKING:** Continuous barking of a dog in an unusual manner is cause for alarm. Determine the location of the dog and call the Sheriff's Office

# Direction and Locations

In order to give the Sheriff's Office an accurate report of a crime or suspicious activity, you must be able to give an accurate description of the location. The description includes the direction; north, south, east or west. If you have trouble with directions, always remember the sun sets in the west. Just like in the cowboy movies. If you are facing west, east is behind you, north is to your right and south to your left. The sun and moon rise in the east, set in the west. Maps will almost always be oriented with north at the top of the map.

Learn the directions in which your streets travel, north and south, east and west, perhaps even northwest and southeast. It is important to know directions for reporting information.

A location description is best given by:

1. What is happening.
2. When did it happen.
3. Using the specific address.
4. Where at the location the incident is occurring.
5. How is it happening.

Examples:

- *"Two men just came running out of the side door of McDonald's at 123 So. Main and are heading east on Second Street in a tan Toyota pick-up truck."*
- *"I am hearing screams coming from a second floor apartment in the rear of 2842 So. Chesapeake."*
- *"Something suspicious, may be drugs, is happening on the south east corner of Vincent and 23rd."*

**BE SPECIFIC** with your information, give the exact location, the best possible description of the suspects and their vehicle.

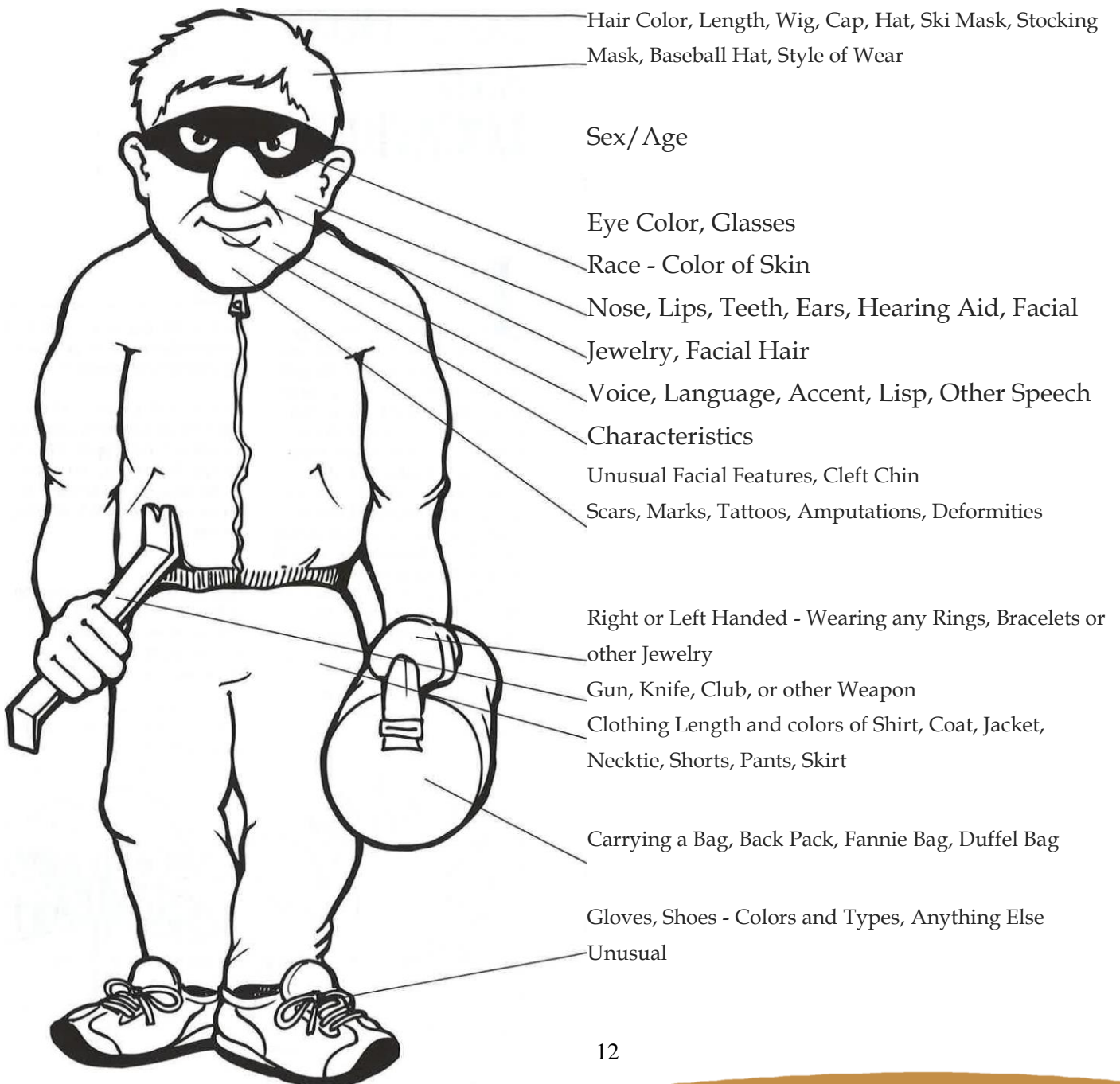
- WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHO, HOW AND WHY  
is what the Sheriff's Office needs to know, preferably in this order.



# Suspect Identification

Participants must be able to describe a person or suspect. In identifying a suspect, work from top to bottom of their body. The most important identification features are sex, height, weight, race, physical impairments, tattoos, scars and approximate age. These are the least likely to be altered by the suspect.

Height and Approximate Weight, Build or Posture



# Vehicle Details

## KIND OF VEHICLE

- Car - 2 door, 4 door, sports car, convertible
- Recreation or Sport Utility Vehicle
- Camper - style, on the back of a pick-up
- Van - station wagon, windowed or solid sides
- Truck - Small pick up, Large pick up, flat bed, stake truck, boxed cargo truck
- Motorcycle - small or large, side car, domestic or foreign, street, dirt

## COLORS

- Single color - two colors
- Color and shade of that color (Blue - Midnight blue, powder blue, aqua blue)
- Window tinting - rear and/or side windows, color of tint

## MAKE& MODEL

- Make: Ford, Chevrolet, Mercury, Buick, Plymouth, Chrysler, Dodge, Honda, Nissan, Kia, Volvo, Mercedes, Toyota, etc?
- Model: Maxima, Mustang, Camero, Thunderbird, Taurus, Camry, Civic, Accord, 350Z, Explorer, etc?

## YEAR

- If you know the year, great. If you don't, guess on how old you think it is, several years old, really a wreck?

## ADDITIONAL THINGS

- Any identifying bumper stickers, dents, bullet holes, broken windows?
- Was it lowered or raised from the standard production model
- Was it damaged in any way? Bullet holes? Been in a crash?
- Hub caps missing, chrome wheels?

### LICENSE PLATES

**KNOW** the license plate number of any vehicle that is suspicious; include state and license plate colors.

**RECORD IT** quickly and exactly as you see it.

**REPORT** your suspicion to the Sheriff's Office quickly so they can pursue and apprehend someone involved in possible criminal activity.

# Reporting a Crime

If you know a crime is happening, or suspect that something suspicious or dangerous is going on, or even if potential trouble exists, do the following:

- Make an assumption if it is an **EMERGENCY**.
- An emergency requires **IMMEDIATE SHERIFF, FIRE AND/OR RESCUE RESPONSE**.
- If the situation is **ROUTINE**, then do not tie up the emergency lines. Call the Non-Emergency Number 540-658-4400.
- Unsure? Call 911.

**WHAT, WHEN, WHERE AND WHO** are the first four things you need to know to report a crime. **HOW AND WHY** are very important, but many times you don't know these answers.

When calling, here is what to provide, and what you may be asked:

- **FIRST** You will be asked what is your emergency? Sheriff, Fire or Medical?
- What is your location, your name and phone number? Are you in any danger?
- **WHAT** is happening. Try to be as calm and specific as possible.
- **WHAT** is needed. Sheriff? Fire Department? Paramedic?
- **WHEN** is it happening. Is it now? How long ago did it occur?
- **WHERE** is it happening? Give the specific address and directions.
- **WHO** is involved? Quick descriptions of the victims and the perpetrators need to be communicated.

Then **WAIT** for the operator's questions. Be as specific and factual as possible in answering them. Follow any instructions given to you. If you have to generalize about an answer, then specify that to the operator. Know the location you are calling from. Cooperate fully with the operator and the follow-up personnel who may contact you.

The same series of questions need to be answered when you are calling in a routine situation. A routine situation is one in which immediate response is not necessary, but does require sheriff attention. A stolen battery, stereo or cellular phone in your car does require attention, but not immediate response.

# Participants Responsibility

As a Neighborhood Watch Participant you have a responsibility to:

- Learn your neighbor's names including all occupants of their residences. Be able to recognize them and their vehicles without any hesitation.
- Attend all Neighborhood Watch meetings.
- Keep your personal copies of the NHW Family Data Summary Sheets, NHW Telephone Tree, and NHW Block Map in an easily accessible, secured place and continually updated with any new information provided by your Block Captain.
- Properly identify all property using the guidelines suggested at your Neighborhood Watch Meetings. Become involved with Operation ID, other home security programs and maintain an accurate inventory of your valuables.
- Implement all security measures suggested by the Stafford County Sheriff's Office after a security survey has been completed in your home.
- Learn the techniques of getting an accurate description of a suspect vehicle. Practice these by writing them down from memory so when the need arises to actually report a suspicious incident you are prepared.
- Keep an eye on your neighbor's homes and report any suspicious activities to the Sheriff's Office. Again, write the description down, so you don't forget. **DO NOT DELAY REPORTING.** A few minutes delay is enough time to reduce the chances of ever catching the criminal.
- Display NHW window warnings around your home. Report missing or damaged NHW signs.
- Teach children respect for the law and crime prevention techniques around the neighborhood.
- Remember always that your responsibility is to report crime. Do not take any risks to prevent a crime or try to make an arrest. The responsibility for apprehending criminals belongs to the Sheriff's Office.
- When you plan to leave for any length of time, arrange to have your mail picked up or put on "Temporary Hold" at your post office. Newspapers should be picked up by a neighbor or stopped. Timers to activate lights, TV, and radio should be set up in your house. In rural areas, timers should be set to activate lights and radios in out buildings. Garbage cans should be taken in. Don't leave signals saying "no one is home."
- Notify your neighbors and Block Captain you are going away so added attention can be placed on your home.
- **GET INVOLVED:** Look out for each other. Be a good witness with written notes.

Participate in you NHW programs.



# Neighborhood Watch Programs

## **Address Display**

The first project you should undertake is to be sure that all the homes in the watch are clearly displaying their address numbers. Precious time can be lost if emergency equipment cannot locate the correct address.

We suggest that you do not display your name on your mailbox. Annoying or obscene telephone callers can locate their victims by seeing a name and address on a mailbox and matching it with the number in the telephone book.

### **Address Tips:**

- Use numbers at least 3 inches tall
- Use numbers that are a contrasting color from the background they are displayed on
- Consider painting numbers on the curbing near the driveway (Keep this area clear of debris, such as fallen leaves)
- Put numbers on both sides of your mailbox
- Use signs or arrows to show which address goes with which home if several mailboxes are grouped together
- Help your disabled and senior neighbors display their addresses

## **Home Security Surveys**

Let the Crime Prevention Unit of the Stafford County Sheriff's Office help you make educated decisions about security hardware. Call the Crime Prevention unit at 540-658-4030 to schedule a free Home Security Survey. We will come to your home and inspect for security weaknesses and other hazards.

Every home should have deadbolt locks on all exterior doors. Sliding doors and windows should be secured to prevent them from being lifted out of their tracks while locked. All windows should be secured with auxiliary locks or pins. Invite us to your home and find out how easy and inexpensive it can be to secure your home.

## Operation Identification

Stolen articles that lack positive identification marks create many problems. Often a citizen will report something stolen but will not know the serial number of the item for it to be tracked through state and national information systems. Property, that lacks any identification marks or cannot be traced to the owner through the serial number, is taken into law enforcement custody. It cannot be returned to the rightful owner, and it cannot be used as evidence against the criminal. He or she may be released without being held accountable for the crime he or she committed against you.

To help protect your belongings record the serial numbers and descriptions of your valuables. This can be as simple as keeping a log of this information, keep the completed log in a secure place. Be sure and update the information as needed. We recommend using a website like ReportIT to store your information. ReportIT lets you securely store serial numbers, item descriptions, pictures and scans of receipts so that your items may be more easily identified in the event of theft or loss.

For more information on ReportIT visit their website at <https://reportit.leadsonline.com>.

You may wish to mark your property with a different identifiable number using an engraver. Due to the danger of releasing your personal information, especially to someone who has stolen your property, it is not recommended that you use your social security number on your belongings. Choose a 4 to 8-character number or word and number that is specific to you. Examples: your street address numbers, the last 4 digits of your home, work, or cell phone, or your initials and your spouse's date of birth. The Stafford County Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit loans these engravers to program participants to engrave their belongings.

Another way to protect your belongings is to photograph or video record them. This is a very valuable asset should you be the victim of a burglary or even a house fire. Keep the photos and/or video in a safe place. Remember, just like any other computer file, always have a backup in a safe place in case the original is destroyed.

## Operation Night Light

The purpose of Neighborhood Watch is to encourage neighbors to watch for crime. You can't watch if it's too dark to see. Most criminals don't want to be seen. You can keep them away by turning on your outside lights during the night. Lighting is a major deterrent to crime during the hours of darkness.

It costs less than \$50.00 a year to have a 40-watt bulb at your front door and a 60-watt bulb at the rear turned on all night. It costs less than \$35 a year to have a 60-watt LED light bulb on the front and rear of your home turned on all night. This is very inexpensive protection and it enhances the beauty of your neighborhood.

# When Should I Call The Sheriff?

*While this manual was intended to educate home owners in the prevention of crime, there is no guarantee that you won't become a victim of crime.*

*If you are a victim of crime, witness a crime or observe any suspicious activity, you should contact the Sheriff's Office immediately.*

**NON-EMERGENCY**  
**(540) 658-4400**

**FOR EMERGENCIES**  
**DIAL 9-1-1**

**Sheriff's Office Administration** (540) 658-4450

**Stafford County Sheriff's Office**  
**Crime Prevention** (540) 658-4030

*[www.staffordsheriff.com](http://www.staffordsheriff.com)*



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