



# The Watch

## “Keeping an Eye on Stratford”

### Neighborhood Watch

Decades ago crime rates across the U.S. increased at an alarming pace. Citizens and law enforcement agencies focused on developing crime prevention programs to help reduce this growing trend. In 1972 The National Sheriff's Association organized the National Neighborhood Watch Program. This pilot program was funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration of the U.S. Department of Justice and was designed to enlist the participation of citizens with law enforcement to help reduce and prevent crime. Since then Neighborhood Watch has become one of the most effective means of fighting crime in our communities. This is because you and your neighbors are the ones who really know what is going on in your area, most likely to be the first to see a crime and call for help, and are in the best position to report non crime related issues:

- Report code violations, unsafe street conditions, etc. that degrade the quality of life in your area
- Notify the town's zoning or blight officer due to junk cars or abandoned properties
- Keep your block clean and free of graffiti
- Provide a safe environment for your children.

#### What Is Neighborhood Watch?

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program that enlists the active participation of residents in cooperation with law enforcement to reduce crime, solve problems, and improve the quality of life in your area. In it you will get to know and work with your neighbors, and learn how to:

- Recognize and report crimes and suspicious activities
- Protect yourself, your family, and your property,
- Protect your neighbor's family and property
- Identify crime and disorder problems in your area and work with Stratford Police to solve them.

#### How to Start and Maintain a Neighborhood Watch Program

The following steps explain how to get a Neighborhood Watch program started and maintained in your area:

**Talk to your neighbors.** See if there's interest in forming a Neighborhood Watch group in your area. If there is contact the Crime Watch office for help.

**Talk to the police department.** Contact the Crime Watch office at the Stratford Police Department and ask to talk to the person who is responsible for Neighborhood Watch. The Crime Watch person will suggest how you should proceed and discuss the crime and other problems that you will have to deal with.

**Talk to your neighbors again.** Tell them about the benefits of a program and the problems to be addressed. Ask about convenient times and places for the first meeting. Be sure to mention that Neighborhood Watch does not require frequent meetings or personal risks, and

that a Crime Watch representative will be invited to the first meeting to answer questions.

**Planning the first meeting.** Select a date, time, and place for the first meeting. Meetings are usually held at a home, police department, or community center. Send out meeting announcements a few weeks ahead of the date. You can distribute fliers, make phone calls, or send emails. Send out reminders a few days before the meeting.

Prepare an agenda and sign-in sheet for the first meeting. Quite often the police departments CAO will attend to talk about the crime and disorder problems in your area, how to get crime and crime prevention information on the Crime Watch website at [www.crimewatchofstratford.org](http://www.crimewatchofstratford.org), and how the partnership with the police department will work. The meeting should last about one hour. Consider providing refreshments, e.g., cookies and coffee. The agenda should allow time for questions, answers, and other topics.

**First meeting.** The first meeting is critical in forming of a group. All attendees should introduce themselves and sign a sheet with their names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses so they can be contacted about future meetings and activities. They should be assured that their personal information will not be given to anyone without their permission. The Crime Watch representative and the police departments Community Affairs Officer will talk about the topics listed above and answer questions. Then the group should define the area to be covered and select a Block Captain or Co-Captains.

The area covered by a group in a neighborhood with single-family homes can range from several homes on one side of a street to several blocks with homes on both sides of the streets. The area can also include neighborhood parks, etc. The area covered in a neighborhood with apartment complexes can range from a single complex to several complexes.

The initial duties of the Block Captain or Co-Captains are listed below:

- Compile a membership list
- Develop an area map with home addresses
- Neighborhood Watch signs and sign hardware will be supplied by Crime Watch of Stratford.

**Continuing duties of the Block Captain or Co-Captains.** After the group is formed their duties will depend on their organizational skills and interests, and the nature and objectives of the group. The following are some possibilities:

- Recruit new members
- Maintain a membership list and area map with home addresses
- Keep members informed about area crime and disorder
- Try to see group members frequently
- Establish and maintain a phone tree with home and work numbers that group members can use to contact residents in an emergency

- Develop an area activity profile to help members recognize unusual or suspicious activities in the area. This could include vehicle descriptions, work hours, school hours for children, and scheduled services, e.g., gardening
- Act as a spokesperson for the group
- Serve as liaison with the Crime Watch organization
- Plan, announce, and facilitate meetings
- Organize crime prevention activities, e.g., watching homes when residents are away

#### Subsequent Meetings and Activities.

Meetings of the whole group should be held at least once a year. They can be held more often if there is information to be distributed and discussed, a problem to address, or a special event to be planned and held. The key to keeping a Neighborhood Watch group active is maintaining interest over time and communicating with members.

Meetings can be scheduled to discuss specific crime prevention or other topics. The Stratford Police can also provide officers to talk on domestic violence, workplace violence, gangs, child and adult abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, identity theft, landlord/tenant relations, bike safety, homeland security, etc. Meetings can also be scheduled to address a serious incident in the area, or two or more less-serious incidents of the same type. Problem solving usually proceeds in the following steps:

**Definition.** What is the problem? Some examples are car break-ins and thefts, home burglaries, speeding, unlicensed solicitors, graffiti, panhandling, and trash dumping.

**Analysis.** What are the common elements of the problem? They could be time of day, location, kinds of offenders and victims, kinds of targets, access to targets, methods of defeating security measures, etc.

**Response.** How can the problem be addressed? What can be done to prevent recurrence or reduce the damage if it does recur? What agencies or organizations are responsible and should help in solving the problem? What are the best things to do for short- and long-term results?

**Assessment.** Did the problem go away? Was the damage reduced? If not, what else should be done?

Special events are another good way to keep the group active. The following are some possibilities:

- Neighborhood walks to identify potential crime and other problems
- Block parties
- Cleaning streets, vacant lots, parks, etc.
- Graffiti paint outs. Fund raising to buy signs, e.g., by collecting recyclables
- Bicycle safety and licensing rodeo

## Staying Safe in the Summer

Get involved with Neighborhood Watch. According to Jack Cratty, President of Crime Watch of Stratford, there has been an increase of people stealing from cars around town. They are looking for cars that are unlocked or with windows left open. When they find one they take whatever they find inside. That is easily prevented by locking your car. He also cautions do not leave valuables in plain sight in the car even if it is locked. Put them in the trunk and always be sure to take your keys with you. GPS units are a favorite target. If you have a GPS unit in your vehicle remove it each time you leave your car.

When going to the beach only carry what you think you will need such as one credit card and a small amount of cash. Do not leave bill-folds and purses unattended.

He also cautioned drivers to watch out for kids. In the summer more of them are outdoors.



For kids, he advised them not to leave their bicycles unattended. He also said the owner should put their name somewhere on the bike. Another tip was to

put the owner's name on a piece of paper inside a handle grip.

If a bike is stolen report it to the police. Cratty said many bicycles are recovered and that most are never matched up with their owners because they were never reported stolen or had no identifying marks on them. Many stolen bikes are taken apart and sold and it's not uncommon to recover a bike with mismatched parts from several other bikes.

Cratty recommends getting involved in a Neighborhood Watch group. If your neighborhood does not have one he can tell you how to start one.

"Neighborhood Watch teaches people guidelines for helping the police," he said. "Neighborhood Watch groups are a huge way you can be responsible for your own community."

For information on finding or starting a Neighborhood Watch group call the Crime Watch office at the Stratford Police Department at 203-381-2098.



## New Neighborhood Watch Groups Formed

One of the latest neighborhoods to form is in the Longbrook Park area. This group of approximately 20 households are from Brightwood Av. and Terrill Rd. This group was formed as a result of the "Lower Pond" area of the park recently undergoing a \$315,000.00 renovation after many years of deterioration. This group will be the eyes and ears of the police department to help keep the area in its current condition. The pond was drained and dredged, new walls and walkways were installed around the pond as was general maintenance of the area. The group worked closely with the town administration, Parks and Recreation, the Police Department administration, Public Works, Crime Watch and the

Police Departments Community Affairs Office to get the project completed.

The other neighborhood to be formed is the Roosevelt Av. /Columbus Av. group. Approximately 15 households have joined and a recruitment drive is ongoing. The goal is to sign up as many houses as possible. The group's main reason for forming was to get the neighborhood involved in an effort to keep the area safe for all residents.

Representatives from both groups usually attend the monthly Crime Watch meeting held at the Stratford Police Department on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm.

## Gangs

### What's a Parent to do About Gangs?

Once found in only large cities, gangs have invaded communities of all sizes across the United States. Gangs bring fear and violence to neighborhoods, traffic in drugs, destroy property and drive out businesses. Gangs draw young people away from school and home and into a life of violence.

### Learn About Gangs

Gangs can be organized around race or ethnic group, money-making activities, or territory. Most gang members are male; they range in age from 8 to 22 years. Young people give various reasons for joining gangs. Among the most common reasons are:

- To belong to a group
- For protection
- To earn money
- For excitement and to be with friends

For some, it's even a family tradition. Gangs signal their existence and solidarity through clothing and head coverings, a special vocabulary, tattoos, hand signs, and tagging their territory with graffiti. "Gangsta" rap paints a realistic picture of daily gang activity. The lyrics glorify violence, abuse of women, and disrespect for authority, especially the

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police. Its popularity among the young has helped spread the culture of gangs, cutting across class, economic, racial and geographic lines.

### Signs That Your Child Might Be In a Gang

- Changes in types of friends
- Changes in dress habits, such as wearing the same color combination all the time
- Gang symbols on books or clothing
- Tattoos
- Secretiveness about activities
- Extra cash from unknown sources
- Carrying a weapon
- Declining interest in school and family
- Being arrested or detained by the police.

If you notice these patterns, get help. Contact the school counselor or the gang crimes unit of your local law enforcement agency.

### Make Sure Your Child Doesn't Need a Gang

- Show your child love with lots of hugs and reassurances.
- Talk with and listen to your child.
- Supervise your children's activities. Help them get involved in athletics or other activities that interest them.
- Know about your child's friends and their friends' families.

- Put a high value on education and help your child to do his or her best in school. Do everything possible to prevent dropping out.
- Talk about your values and why you think gangs are dangerous. Discuss the violence, drug dealing, hatred of other groups for no reason, and the likelihood of being arrested and imprisoned.
- Don't forget to listen as well.

### What Communities Can Do To Keep Gangs Out

- Develop positive alternatives – after school, weekend, and summer activities where children and teens can learn, expand their world, and have fun.
- Encourage parents to talk to one another through school forums, social events, networks, parenting classes, and support groups.
- Cooperate with police and other agencies.
- Report suspicious activity, set up a Neighborhood Watch
- Get organized and show gangs that your neighborhood has zero tolerance for their activities. Your community has many resources who can work together against gangs, including law enforcement, civic groups, religious congregations, schools, youth agencies, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA/YWCA, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, drug treatment services and community centers.