



Neighborhood Communication

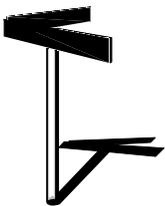
Communication is a foundational element of Block Watch. This includes communication between you and the Sheriff's Office, you and your neighbors, and what your neighborhood communicates to those who enter it. Through Block Watch, you can be better prepared to communicate both to law enforcement, your neighbors, and visitors to your neighborhood.



The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office cannot function effectively without the assistance of concerned, responsible citizens. We are depending on you to call and report all suspicious activity. The following page describes what kinds of suspicious behaviors to watch for, as well as what information is most often needed by 911.



Your neighborhood will be better prepared to prevent crime when an effective strategy to neighborhood communication is established. Block Watch uses three tools to enhance communication on your block; the family information form, the phone tree, and the block map. The family information form is included in this packet to be filled out and given to the block coordinator. A sample phone tree and block map are also included. This information can help you and your neighbors to more easily recognize what is suspicious and contact each other to share information or concerns.



Your neighborhood can communicate to visitors through the use of Block Watch signs. By posting signs at each point of access to your neighborhood, all who come to your block will know you participate in Block Watch. This can give your friends and family comfort as they visit you, and can discourage burglars from committing crime.

Because the Sheriff's Office can never know your neighborhood as well as you do, we rely on you to be the eyes and ears for us. Effective communication increases a criminal's chances of apprehension and reduces the likelihood of crime in your neighborhood.



What is Suspicious?

The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office cannot function effectively without the assistance of concerned, responsible citizens. We are depending on you to call and report all suspicious activity.

Some people fail to call simply because they are not aware of what seemingly innocent activities might be suspicious. Others may notice suspicious activity and be hesitant to call for fear of being a nosy neighbor. Many often take it for granted that someone else has already called the police.

CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY about all suspicious activity. DO NOT worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove to be unfounded. THINK INSTEAD ABOUT WHAT COULD HAPPEN IF YOU *DO NOT* ACT.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR

Anything that seems "out of place," or that is occurring at an unusual time of day could be criminal activity. Some things to watch for and report include:

- A stranger entering your neighbor's house when it is unoccupied.
- Anyone removing accessories, license plates, or gas from a vehicle.
- The sound of breaking glass or loud explosive sound.
- People loitering around schools, parks, secluded areas, or in the neighborhood.
- Vehicles being loaded with valuables and parked in front of a closed business or unattended residence, even if the vehicle looks legitimate.
- Apparent business transactions being conducted from a vehicle.
- People being forced into vehicles, especially if they are juveniles or females.
- An abandoned vehicle parked on your street: This may be a stolen car.
- People making a quick change of vehicles.
- One or more juveniles walking casually through the neighborhood looking into back yards, cars, etc.
- Open or broken doors or windows at a closed business or residence.
- Anyone forcing entrance into or tampering with a residence, business, or vehicle.
- Any person taking a short-cut through a back yard: They may have just broken into your neighbor's home.
- Any vehicles moving slowly and without lights, or following a course that appears to be repetitive in any location, particularly in school, park, or playground areas. Occupants may be looking for places to rob or burglarize, or they could be drug dealers or sex offenders.
- Parked, occupied vehicles containing one or more persons at an unusual hour. The occupants could be lookouts for a possible burglary.
- Juveniles going door-to-door looking for extra work or asking for donations. They may be casing your home for possible burglary opportunities.

While some, if not all, of the suspicious situations described could have innocent explanations, the Sheriff's Office would rather investigate a crime-prone situation than be called when it's too late. You could save a life, prevent an injury, or stop a crime.



Information Most Often Needed

When you call 911, be prepared to answer the following questions to the best of your ability:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Was anybody hurt?
- Who did it?

HOW TO DESCRIBE A SUSPECT:

Try to notice and remember the following characteristics of a suspect. By paying close attention to these features, you will be able to give a more accurate description of the suspect.

- Sex
- Race
- Complexion
- Age
- Height (estimate in 2 inch blocks, for example: between 5'8" and 5'10")
- Weight (estimate in blocks of 10 pounds; for example 160 to 170 pounds)
- Build (large, medium, small, stocky, slender, plus any distinguishing features on parts of the body like tattoos, eyeglasses, scars, etc.)
- Hair (color, thick, thin, balding, mustaches, or beard)
- Clothing (color, type, style - start at the top and work down: hat, coat, shirt, pants, and shoes)
- Direction of travel

DESCRIBING A VEHICLE:

Train yourself to notice the following details about vehicles so you can report them to your dispatcher.

- Color
- Year
- Make
- Body Type (sedan, two-door, convertible, station wagon, etc.)
- License number (specify state)
- Hint: use the acronym CYMBAL = Color, Year, Make, Body And License
- Also look for identifying marks such as specialty attachments, dents, damage, etc.



PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING

- Dial 911 - Remain calm, speak clearly and be ready to provide the dispatcher with the following information:
 - First, indicate whether you need law enforcement, fire, or medical services. If you will require more than one service, first request the service that will maintain life. The other services that are needed will automatically follow.
 - What is happening (a brief description)
 - Where is the location (address & nearest cross street)
 - Your name and the phone number from which you are calling
 - Continue to answer the dispatcher's questions so that he or she may have up-to-date information to relay to the responding unit. It is not necessary for you to hang up before deputies can be dispatched.
- Stay on the line until the dispatcher has all the information needed. Do not hang up until you are instructed to do so by the dispatcher.



Home Security Basics

The following few pages are designed to help you evaluate your own security, and offer suggestions on ways to "harden" your residence against break-ins. The emphasis is on securing windows and doors: as you might expect, those are the areas of vulnerability for a thief intent on entry.

What may surprise you is about half of all burglars enter homes through unlocked doors and windows. Just by making a practice of locking doors and windows, you can reduce your chance of a burglary by half! Please take the time to look at the security methods outlined here, and use them to increase the security of your home.

Doors and Windows

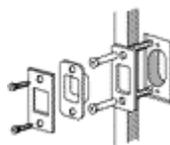
The most common ways of forcing entry through a door is by kicking in the door, twisting off the doorknob, or prying the door open. When evaluating your security, consider the following recommendations.

DOOR CONSTRUCTION:

- Doors should be of metal clad or solid wood construction
- A 190 degree door view should be installed in all doors without windows
- Door hinges should be on the interior side of the door. If hinges are on the exterior of the door, hinges should be "pinned" to prevent door removal.
- Consider break-resistant glass or laminates for windows within 40" of the door lock.

LOCKS:

- All doors should have a properly installed deadbolt
 - 1" long bolt throw
 - rotating or beveled collar
 - case-hardened steel
 - strike plate secured with 3" screws
- Chain locks are often used as a night latch. Chain locks are not recommended because they are easy to overcome with force.



SLIDING DOORS AND WINDOWS:

- Sliding doors and windows should have a secondary blocking device such as a track lock or dowel in the track.
- make sure the door or window can't be lifted out from its track. Screws installed to project slightly from the upper track will prevent windows and doors from being lifted out.

Outdoor Security

GARAGES:

- Keep your garage door closed, even when at home. Leaving your garage open gives burglars the opportunity to "take inventory".
- Padlocks can be inserted into holes in garage door tracks to prevent the door from being forced open.

STORAGE SHEDS:

- Don't forget about securing storage sheds. If the storage shed door doesn't permit installation of a deadbolt, install a good quality hasp and padlock.
- Hasps need to be bolted, not screwed, to the surface.
- Bolts should not be visible when hasp is in place.

LIGHTS:

- Porch lights should be on from dusk to dawn every night. Consider using timers to turn lights on so you never come home to a dark house.
- Timers should be set to several lights to establish a look of occupancy.
- Use yard lights to illuminate walkways, driveways, and garages.
- Motion detectors can be used to alert the resident and neighbors that someone is in the area.

LANDSCAPING:

- Trim shrubs around house to prevent a place for concealment by burglars.
- Trim trees up approximately 5 feet for the same reason.
- A deterrent to vulnerable first floor windows is to plant low, thorny bushes around these windows.
- Use landscaping to define the boundaries of your property.
- Fences should establish the boundaries of your property without offering concealment for a burglar.
- Make sure your house numbers are visible from the roadway, in the event that an emergency response is needed.

Indoor Security

- Operation ID - Engrave your valuables with your driver's license number, and keep a record of what you have engraved.
 - Set lights on timers to make your home appear occupied at all times.
 - Use a greeting on your answering machine that doesn't tell the caller you are gone or how long you will be out.
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- **Use these tips, along with those presented at the Block watch meeting, to make your home a safer place for you and your family.**



Operation ID



Have you ever wondered what happens to property that is seized or recovered by law enforcement? In many cases it is destroyed or auctioned simply because it can't be traced to the proper owners. In cases of property that is seized from suspected burglars, criminal charges cannot be made if the property is not positively identified as belonging to someone else.

Proper identification makes it easier for the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office to return your personal property. How would you feel if you had an irreplaceable heirloom stolen from you? Even though your insurance might cover it, you'd probably rather have the item itself returned to you. Engraving your Washington State driver's license number, preceded by the initials WADL on valuables identifies them as uniquely yours. If you do not have a driver's license, engrave your Washington State Identification card, preceded by the initials WAID on your valuables.

There are instances where engraving would damage or reduce the value of an item. Things such as rare stamps or coins, antiques, small collectibles, and small electronic items should not be marked if doing so would destroy or decrease their value. These items may be photographed or videotaped and kept along with the property inventory form, for proof of ownership.



The program is a strong deterrent to thieves. Although it does not guarantee your valuables will not be stolen, it has been shown to reduce the incidence of stolen property. Marked articles are difficult to dispose of because they are more easily traced.

While marking your property, make a list of all valuables. You can use the inventory list included in this packet. List the item, brand name, model, and serial number. Check off each item that you have marked and photographed or videotaped. An inventory of all valuables will be important should you be the victim of burglary, fire, or other destructive incidents. Keep one list at home and another, along with a copy of photos or videos, in a safety deposit box or other safe location.



HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN OPERATION ID

- Use an electric engraving tool to mark all articles of value, especially those most likely to be stolen: i.e. stereos, TVs, VCRs, tools, appliances, etc.
- Record all marked property on an inventory list.
- Photograph or videotape all property that should not be marked, as well as all marked property
- Display Operation ID warning stickers in your windows to advertise that you have marked your property. (NOTE: Do not display Operation ID stickers unless you have actually marked your property.)





Block Watch Responsibilities

Coordinator:

- Create a block map, and update it at least once every year or when new neighbors move to the block.
- Collect family information forms and keep them current.
- Give new neighbors the crime prevention information provided at the block watch meetings and ask them if they would like to join the Block Watch.
- Notify all Block Watch members if a neighbor is burglarized.
- Organize a yearly block get-together. This is a good opportunity for neighbors to become reacquainted and renew their commitment to watch out for each other. It is also a good time to update the block map and discuss any crime related problems, as well as prevent similar problems from happening in the future.
- If you need more crime prevention materials, or have questions and concerns, contact the Crime Prevention Unit at 676-6650 or 384-5360. The office is open Monday through Friday, 8:30-4:30. If we are out of the office, please leave a message and we will return your call as soon as possible.

Participants:

- Become acquainted with surrounding neighbors.
- Learn crime prevention techniques.
- Secure homes and personal property.
- Maintain a cooperative system of surveillance over one another's property.
- Report suspicious and criminal activity to the Sheriff's Office and serve as a witness if needed.



Family Information

Name(s): _____ Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Day Phone(s): _____

Members of your family: _____

Pet Description: _____

Vehicle Description: _____

Work and School Schedules: _____

Emergency Medical Information: _____



Home Security Checklist

Outside Perimeter:

Yes No

- Are exterior lights on at dusk and replaced promptly if burned out?
- Are trees and shrubs trimmed from doors and windows?
- Are all entrances to your home (doors and windows) well-lit at night?
- Is there a wide-angle viewer (180 degrees) on the main entrance?
- Are deadbolt locks installed on all exterior doors, with strike plates properly secured?
- Are your doors of solid construction and fit in their frames snugly?
- If hinge pins are outside, are they pinned to prevent removal?
- Are your windows fitted with locks and do you lock them?
- Are sliding doors and windows secure against forcing locks or lifting out of frames?
- Do you keep tools, ladders, etc. in places inaccessible to potential burglars?
- Do you store lawn mowers, barbecues, etc. out of sight when not in use?
- When you move to a new residence, do you have all locks re-keyed?
- Do you have your locks re-keyed immediately if your keys are lost or stolen?

Inside Security:

Yes No

- Do you refuse to provide information regarding your property to phone surveys?
- Do you leave lights on and a radio playing when out for short periods?
- Do you avoid leaving large amounts of cash at home?
- Have you marked your valuables and recorded serial numbers for identification?

Vacation Security:

Yes No

- Do you notify a trusted neighbor of your travel plans?
- Do you leave your neighbor a key and request periodic house checks?
- Do you leave window shades in the normal position?
- Do you cancel all deliveries?
- Do you make arrangements for your yard to be kept up and mail to be picked up?
- Do you use a light timer on interior and exterior lights?
- Do you check all doors and windows to be sure they are secure before leaving?

Apartment Security:

Yes No

- Do you refer unknown persons seeking entrance to the manager?
- Do you report suspicious activities to the manager or police?
- Do you advise the manager of travel plans, request apartment checks & mail pick-up?

If your answer is no to any of the above you should take steps to improve your home security.

