



Missoula City/County Neighborhood Watch

Introduction:

Neighborhood Watch programs are the most effective means available for keeping crime out of neighborhoods. It relies on the best crime fighting tool ever invented, i.e., a good neighbor. Fortunately, good neighbors are everywhere. They live in houses, apartment buildings, urban, suburban and rural areas.

The Missoula City/County Neighborhood Watch program is supported by the Missoula Sheriff's Office, the Missoula Police Department, and individual residents in a community-wide effort to reduce residential crimes. It is neighbors working together with law enforcement make a great crime fighting team.

What is Neighborhood Watch?

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program enlisting the active participation of residents in cooperation with local law enforcement to reduce the incidents and fear of crime in their communities. It involves neighbors getting to know each other to develop a program of mutual assistance. It involves neighbors being educated in crime reporting and suspect identification techniques. Finally, it involves neighbors using crime prevention strategies as tools to reduce crime in their communities.

Why Neighborhood Watch?

The community has the primary responsibility for fighting crime. The most effective approach to fighting crime is a proactive one, including prevention. This can happen when neighbors cooperate with each other to assist their local law enforcement agencies. Neighborhood Watch members place stickers in their windows and post Neighborhood Watch signs on streets, warning criminals they are in an active Neighborhood Watch community, and the "neighbors are watching out for each other."

Remember, you and your neighbors are the ones who really know what is going on in your community and there can not be a law enforcement officer on every corner. Resident involvement is essential to combat crime.

Participation Requirements:

There are a few minor requirements to participate in the Missoula City/County Neighborhood Watch Program. Every group must have at least one Block Captain. This person serves as a contact point for the law enforcement agencies and well as the neighborhood. Often the Block Captain attends quarterly meetings with other Block Captains and law enforcement representatives. (Alternate Block Captains is acceptable so that no one person is responsible for attending meetings.)

The other requirement is that every household within the watch group pays annual dues of \$2.00. This money is compiled with all the watch groups in Missoula and goes towards purchasing signs, window decals, assisting neighborhoods with block parties, and some operational costs.

As an added benefit, quarterly newsletters are distributed from the Police Department. Newsletters cover a variety of topics, from safety tips, local and up-to-date crime information, meeting information, and really anything any member would like to have addressed.

How do I start a Neighborhood Watch Program?

The Missoula Police Department or Sheriff's Office will assist any group of neighbors in starting a watch group. A representative from either the Police Department or Sheriff's Office will be available for your first meeting to assist with the initial organization of the group and discuss crime concerns specific to your neighborhood or community.

Talk to your neighbors. Are they interested? Do they understand the value of a Neighborhood Watch Program? Are they aware of, or concerned about specific crime problems in your area? Be sure to mention the following information points in your conversation, especially if they are undecided about the benefits of a watch group:

- Neighborhood Watch is a partnership between neighbors to assist local law enforcement (either the Police Department or Sheriff's Office)
- Neighborhood Watch does not require frequent meetings
- Neighborhood Watch does not ask anyone to take personal risks to prevent crime
- Neighborhood Watch does not involve maintaining a schedule of neighborhood patrols by neighbors.
- Law enforcement personnel will attend a meeting to answer questions about crime, about Neighborhood Watch, and provide information about police procedures.

Set a meeting date far enough in advance to give everyone adequate notice. Make sure the time is convenient for your neighbors as well as the law enforcement representative that will be attending. Distribute a flyer announcing the meeting and remind everyone a few days before to assure his or her attendance. If you are anticipating a small group, have the meeting at one of the houses in the neighborhood. The location should make everyone feel comfortable. Everyone may not attend, and that is okay. The program can still be successful with a majority of the neighborhood present. You also do not need a large group. One city block is still considered a neighborhood in Missoula and it is always easy to expand a watch group.

If you have any questions, concerning starting a Neighborhood Watch or would like to set a first meeting, please call the Crime Prevention officer at 552-6335 for City Police or for County Sheriff's Office call 258-4810.

Be a good neighbor and make your community safer by starting a Neighborhood Watch Program.

