

# *Home Owner Association (HOA)/Neighborhood Watch*



CITIZENS MANUAL

January 2013

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RE: **VILLAGE OF OSWEGO**  
- HOA/Neighborhood Watch Program

Dear Oswego Residents,

The crime problem in our nation is both costly and demoralizing. Directly or indirectly, we are all affected by crime that has caused injury, financial loss and intimidation. These situations demonstrate vividly the need for community involvement and assistance in crime prevention, reporting and efforts in the Oswego Police Department HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program.

This community-based crime prevention program is a simple and direct approach toward protecting our community from criminal attacks. The program involves the reduction of criminal opportunity through citizen's participation in crime prevention measures, such as being alert and aware, reporting suspicious and criminal activity to the police, and initiating actions which reduce criminal opportunity.

In these times of reported apathy within our communities, it is encouraging to find the concern and involvement you and your neighbors display with your HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH efforts. The Oswego Police Department stands ready to assist and support you with this program.

Again, I welcome and appreciate your efforts toward making the Village of Oswego a safer place to live and visit.

Sincerely,

Chief Jeffrey R. Burgner  
Oswego Police Department

## ***The Role of The Community in HOA/Neighborhood Watch***

It is everyone's responsibility to make sure our Community is safe. If you have ever fallen victim to crime, the shock, anger and helplessness is not easily forgotten. To protect yourself we must look out for one another. Ask yourself:

**Is your neighborhood ready to resist crime? Or is it a target?**

Chances are good that a home burglarized today is located in a neighborhood where one vital prevention tool is missing: an active HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH group. This community based organization of citizens working together with law enforcement has become the key to preventing burglary and crime nationwide.

The National Sheriffs Association created the National NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program in 1972, with financial assistance from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, to unite law enforcement agencies, private organizations, and individual citizens in a massive effort to reduce residential crime. Since its establishment, HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH has developed thousands of such local residential crime prevention programs in which individual citizens work to 1) make their own homes and families less inviting targets for crime, and 2) cooperate with law enforcement through block and neighborhood groups to control crime through-out the community.

### **Neighborhood Crime Prevention: A Joint Responsibility**

The prevention of crime-particularly crime involving residential neighborhoods is a responsibility that must be shared equally by law enforcement and private citizens. The fact is, *the impact on crime prevention by law enforcement alone is minimal when compared with the power of private citizens working with law enforcement and with each other.* HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH is based on this concept of cooperation, and nationwide statistics prove that it works. When citizens take positive steps to secure their property and neighbors learn how to report suspicious activity around their homes, burglary and related offenses decrease dramatically.

## **Taking Positive Steps**

Victim responses to a home burglary generally follow a similar pattern: Initial fear and anger give way to an obsession with seeing the intruder caught and making sure the home is never targeted by criminals again. In the past, many frightened victims sat back and simply hoped their homes would be spared a repeat performance. They, as well as their neighbors, worried and wondered about what they could do to protect their property.

Since the establishment of HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, however, thousands of homeowners who want to take intelligently planned action to decrease crime statistics in their areas have discovered that they have a ready, willing and highly qualified partner in their local law enforcement agency. These homeowners now know that their agency would rather work **with** citizens to prevent crime than spend time and manpower investigating it after it occurs.

It is a fact of life that relationships in many of today's communities have become less personal than they were years ago. Families are more transient, children have more activities that take them and their parents away from home and there are more families with both parents working. The once-familiar sight of families visiting with each other on front porches while keeping a watchful eye on children and activities in the neighborhood is a rarity in most communities today. This trend away from personal contact in the neighborhood and the decrease in time families spend at home are two of the essential ingredients that make communities ripe for crimes of opportunity, such as burglary.

### **Burglary – A Target for HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH**

Burglary, the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft, is the crime that is targeted particularly by the HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program. While it is one of the most prevalent and difficult crimes facing law enforcement today, it is, at the same time, the one major crime that CAN be effectively resisted by each citizen taking POSITIVE ACTION at home.

Through HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Programs, determined citizens are decreasing their chances of becoming victims. Alert program participants in communities across the country are making things hard for potential criminals by:

- Arranging for home security inspections by crime prevention officers to identify security vulnerabilities.
- Upgrading locks, security hardware, and lighting; and installing alarms when security inspections show particular hazards.
- Training family members to keep valuables secure and to lock doors and windows when leaving home; it is a good practice to keep doors locked whether anyone is at home or not.
- Asking neighbors to watch for suspicious activity when the house is vacant.
- Marking valuable property with an identifying number to discourage theft and help law enforcement agencies identify and return lost or stolen property.
- Encouraging home builders to use effective door and window locks and to provide outside lighting for all new home and apartment construction.
- Organizing block parent and block WATCH groups to assist children, the elderly, and other especially vulnerable persons if they appear to be distressed, in danger, or lost.
- Meeting in neighborhood groups with trained crime prevention officers to discuss needs and crime prevention strategies.
- Developing neighborhood telephone/email tree systems for quickly alerting each other about criminal activity in the area.
- Encouraging the development of signals for use in adjacent residences when someone needs help.
- Arranging for ongoing programs where crime prevention experts can present home and neighborhood security tips at regularly scheduled meetings.

## **STARTING AN HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH GROUP**

You've heard about the benefits of HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH participation. You suspect – or know – that there is a crime problem in your area. How do you get a program started in your neighborhood?

- 1. Form a small planning committee of neighbors to discuss needs, the level of interest, and possible problems. Decide on a date and place for an initial HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH meeting.**
- 2. Contact your Oswego Police Department HOA representative. Request they attend a meeting of your group in the near future to discuss HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH and help assess your community's problems and needs. Inquire about crime statistics for your area, but bear in mind that crime is typically under reported.**
- 3. Contact as many of your neighbors as possible, asking them:**
  - **If they feel at risk of being burglarized or being the victim of other crimes.**

- **If they have taken any steps to protect their homes;**
- **If they would be willing to attend a meeting to organize a HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH group in your area.**

### **Planning for a Successful First Meeting**

Schedule your kickoff meeting in a place convenient to the neighborhood, such as a private home, church, community building, school, library or police Department. Contact your Oswego Police Department HOA Officer and verify that the officer will be able to attend. Obtain a map of all the streets and households to be covered by your HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH organization. Start with a manageable number of homes at first; you can always add other areas. Design a flyer or letter of invitation and see that one is delivered to every home on your target list. Try to get each house hold to commit at least one adult member to the meeting so you can estimate potential attendance.

### **Program Coordination**

HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Coordinator: The coordinator's job is crucial to the success of your program. This may be just the right job for a retiree or other individual who has extra time at home. This person's responsibilities may include:

- Expanding the program and maintaining a current list of participants and neighborhood residents, including names, addresses, home and work telephone numbers, email addresses and vehicle descriptions.
- Acting as a liaison between watch members, law enforcement officers, civic groups and block captains.
- Arranging neighborhood crime prevention training programs.
- Obtaining and distributing crime prevention materials, such as stickers and signs.
- Involving others to develop specific crime prevention projects.

BLOCK CAPTAIN: Block Captains should be designated for every 10-15 houses, and they should be directly involved with their immediate neighbors. The block captain's responsibilities may include:

- Acting as liaison between block residents and the Coordinator.
- Establishing a "telephone/email chain" by compiling and distributing a current list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of block participants.
- Visiting and inviting new residents to join HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH; notifying them of meetings and training sessions.

- Contacting each neighbor to discuss possible crime problems, needs for assistance, and suggestions for program improvement.

### **Recognizing Suspicious Activity**

BE ALERT, anything that seems slightly “out of place” or is occurring at an unusual time of day could be criminal activity. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPREHEND A PERSON COMMITTING A CRIME OR TO INVESTIGATE A SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY. Call the police immediately, and do not worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions’ prove to be unfounded. Law enforcement officers would rather investigate than be called when it is too late.

The following incidents MAY indicate possible criminal activity and should be reported:

- Continuous repair operations at a non business location.
- Open or broken doors and windows at a closed business or unoccupied residence.
- Unusual noises, such as gunshots, screaming, or dogs barking continuously.
- Sound of breaking glass.
- A person exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms.
- A vehicle not familiar to the area driving by very slowly or stopped in front of a residence for no apparent reason.

Time and accuracy are critical in reporting crime or suspicious events. Use your law enforcement agency’s emergency number to report life-threatening incidents or a crime in progress, and use the non-emergency number for crimes that have already occurred. Your call could save a life, prevent an injury or stop a crime. The information you provide will be kept confidential. You do not need to give your name although this is often helpful.

### **Suspicious Persons**

Obviously, not every stranger who comes into a neighborhood is a criminal. Legitimate door-to-door sales and repair people appear in residential areas frequently. Occasionally, however, criminals disguise themselves as these workers; therefore, it is important to be alert to the activities of all nonresidents. Law enforcement officials should be called to investigate persons in the following circumstances, who may be suspects in the crimes indicated:

- Going door to door in a residential area, especially if one or more goes to rear of residence or loiters in front of an unoccupied house or closed business.



- Forcing entrance or entering an unoccupied house.
- Running, especially if carrying something of value or carrying unwrapped property at an unusual hour.
- Heavy traffic to and from a residence, particularly if it occurs on a daily basis.
- Screaming.
- Loitering around or peering into cars, especially in parking lots or on streets.
- Loitering around schools, parks or secluded areas.
- Offering items for sale at a very low price.
- Loitering or driving through a neighborhood several items or appearing as delivery person with a wrong address.

### **Suspicious Vehicles**

Vehicles in the following situations MAY be involved in crimes and should be reported to authorities:

- Slow moving, without lights, following aimless course in any location, including residential streets, schools, and play grounds.
- Parked or occupied, containing one or more persons, especially at an unusual hour.
- Parked by a business or unoccupied residence, being loaded with valuables.
- Abandoned in your neighborhood.
- Containing weapons.
- Someone, especially a female or juvenile, being forced into a vehicle.
- Business transactions taking place in it, especially around schools or parks.
- Someone attempting to forcibly enter it, especially in a parking lot.
- Persons detaching mechanical parts or accessories from it.
- Objects being thrown from it.

### **Describing and Reporting Events, Vehicles, and Persons**

Practicing to develop skill in providing quick, accurate descriptions is an excellent HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH meeting activity. In attempting to describe events, vehicles, or persons, write down the details of what you have observed while they are still fresh in your mind so your descriptions to law enforcement officials will be as accurate as possible.

*DESCRIBING EVENTS:* When describing events, write down:

1. What happened;
2. When it happened;
3. Where it occurred;
4. Whether injuries are involved;
5. Whether weapons are involved;

**DESCRIBING VEHICLES:** When describing vehicles, write down:

1. Vehicle license number and state make and type of vehicle, color, and approximate age.
2. Special designs or unusual features, such as vinyl top, mag wheels, body damage, pinstripes, etc.
3. Direction of travel.

**DESCRIBING PERSONS:** In preparing descriptions of persons, it is important to write down the following:

1. Sex
2. Race
3. Age
4. Height (estimated from eye contact level measured against your height)
5. Weight
6. Hair (color and length)
7. Hat
8. Facial Hair
9. Shirt/Pants
10. Coat/Jacket
11. Shoes
12. Any peculiar or distinguishable mannerisms, physical disabilities, disfigurements, scars or tattoos.
13. Voice Characteristics
14. Direction of Movement.

### **Home Security Inspections**

One of the most effective ways to educate HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH participants to protect their property is to arrange for detailed security inspections of their homes. Please visit the Oswego Police Department web site ([www.oswegopoliceil.org](http://www.oswegopoliceil.org)) and click on the Crime Prevention tab under Programs. Home Safety/Security checklists are available. You can also contact the Oswego Police Department to make an appointment with an officer to conduct a home security survey.

*HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, sometimes called Crime Watch, Block Watch or Community Watch is a simple program which can have far-reaching results. Starting a HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH Program is not difficult or complicated. Interested citizens can take the first step – or law enforcement professionals may take the lead. Maintaining an active HOA/NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH program may mean the difference between a safe community and one affected by burglary and/or vandalism. Learn how to get involved – and play a role in a safer America.*