

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH PROGRAM

Tool Kit

WHAT IS NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH?

Neighbourhood Watch is about neighbours looking out for neighbours. The Niagara Regional Police Service supports community-led initiatives that promote awareness, reporting, and prevention while ensuring safety and accountability.

Neighbourhood Watch is primarily an online platform for communities to share information, look out for one another and help mitigate risks in their communities.

Neighbourhood Watch Groups Are Organizations that:

- Focus on their own specific neighbourhoods within the Niagara Region
- Teach citizens techniques to reduce the risk of being victimized at home and in public.
- Train citizens to recognize and report suspicious activities. Become good witnesses.
- Teach participants how to make their homes more secure and how to properly reduce risks to their property. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)
- Allow neighbours to get to know each other and their routines so that unusual activity can be reported and investigated.
- Bring citizens together to address the needs and issues that concern the entire community.

Neighbourhood Watch Groups are not:

- Vigilante forces working outside the normal procedures of law enforcement.
- Programs designed for participants to take personal risks to prevent crime.
- A 100% guarantee that crime will not occur in your neighbourhood.

HOW DO I START A NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH GROUP

Step 1: Visit our website www.niagarapolice.ca

Step 2: Form your local group and contact us via email at neighbourhoodwatch@niagarapolice.ca

Step 3: Keep your group informed and report any crime to police.



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NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH IN ACTION

We Have Group Going. What Do We Do Now?

Neighbourhood Watch is about crime prevention and looking out for your neighbours, it benefits everyone.

What to do:

- Exchange basic information with trusted neighbours: home and work telephone numbers, daily routine of your family, planned vacations or visitors, scheduled deliveries and repairs, and your alarm system.
- Report any unusual or suspicious activities to the police by calling 911. Don't hesitate to call; there is a direct connection between an increase in calls for service and a reduction in crime.
- Recognize potential risks and take steps to reduce or remove those risks (CPTED).
- Make note of the descriptions of suspicious person(s) and vehicles. Write down licence plate information and directions of travel. Take note of the colour of the vehicle, what the suspicious person(s) was wearing, time of day, etc. Give as much specific information as possible.
- Keep neighbours informed of houses that will be unoccupied for extended periods of time.
- Look after neighbour's houses when they are away. Volunteer to collect their mail, newspapers and other deliveries. A stack of several newspapers is a good indication to a suspect that no one is home.
- Create a communication strategy with each other. Email communication, online forum or voice mail system
- Consider establishing a regularly scheduled email newsletter.
- LET THE POLICE APPREHEND CRIMINALS. NEVER PUT YOURSELF IN DANGER.

WHAT ARE SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES?

If you detect any suspicious activity in your neighbourhood or anywhere, call the police Do not worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove to be unfounded. It is better to think of what could happen if you didn't act.



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Examples of Suspicious Activity

Suspicious Persons

- Door-to-door canvassers in a residential area. This is especially suspicious if, after a few houses have been visited, one or more of the subjects goes into the back or side yard. If one remains in the front yard while this occurs, the situation is even more suspicious. They could be "casing the house" for a break and enter. There may be a break and enter in progress, or it could be a soliciting violation or trespass in progress.
- People waiting in front of a house where the occupants are absent or loitering in front of a business establishment which is closed. There may be a break and enter or vehicle theft in progress.
- Someone forcing entrance to or tampering with a residence, business, vehicle, etc. This person is suspicious under almost any circumstance. There may be a break and enter or a theft in progress.
- Non-residents going into back or side yard of house – a possible break and enter or theft may be in progress.
- Person running - especially if he or she is carrying something of value. The person may be fleeing the scene of a crime.
- Person carrying property - may be suspicious depending on the circumstances. For example, if the person is observed at an unusual hour or in an unusual place and if the property is not wrapped as if just purchased, the situation may indicate a crime in progress.
- Exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms. The person may be injured, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or in some kind of need of medical aid.

Suspicious Situations Involving Property

- Property in homes, private garages, storage areas, etc. This is suspicious when there are large or unusual accumulations of property (such as several TV sets in a garage which are new and not being used). The property may have been stolen.
- Property in a vehicle - not suspicious if the property is normally found in vehicles. This property may be stolen if you observe it at unusual hours, particularly TV sets, electronics, unmounted car stereos or auto parts.



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- Property carried by person(s) on foot - normally not suspicious unless at an unusual hour or in an unusual place. This situation is especially questionable if the person is running and/or the property is not wrapped as if just purchased.
- Property being removed from or being placed in vehicles or buildings. This situation is suspicious if odd hours or places are involved, for example, from closed businesses or residences whose owners are known to be absent.

Other Unusual Situations

- Continuous "repair" operations at a non-business location. It is possible that stolen property is being stripped, refinished or altered in some other way.
- Broken windows or doors at closed businesses or residences where the owners are absent.
- Unusual noises - gunshots, screaming, sounds of combat, abnormally barking dogs - anything which suggests foul play or illegal activity.

Suspicious Vehicles

- Certain moving vehicles - slow-moving vehicles without lights which seem to be following no deliberate path. This is suspicious in any location, but especially in school areas, parks and playgrounds. The occupants of the car may be "casing" for sex offenses, drug pushing or for places to break into.
- Certain parked, occupied vehicles - may contain one or more persons. This situation is especially significant if observed at an unusual hour in a commercial area. The car may indicate a lookout for a break and enter in progress.
- Vehicles being loaded with valuables - suspicious if parked in front of a closed business or vacant residence - even if the vehicle is a legitimate-looking commercial vehicle.
- Abandoned vehicle - possibly stolen.
- Vehicle containing weapons - suspicious under most circumstances - may be used for criminal activity.

Other Unusual Activities Involving Vehicles:

- Person(s) attempting forcibly to enter a vehicle.
- Person(s) "stripping" a car, especially at night or in parking lots.
- Apparent business transactions in a vehicle, especially around schools or parks, involving young persons.



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- Possible drug sales.
- Dome lights left on for extended periods of time, ajar doors, broken windows.
- Person being forced into vehicles - especially if females or young persons.

How Do I Report Suspicious Activity or a Crime? Be a Good Witness.

- Call the Niagara Regional Police Service. Dial 911 for emergencies. For non-emergencies dial 905-688-4111. If you are not sure if the incident qualifies as an emergency, call 911 when in doubt.
- Identify yourself by your name and address and relay the information. *Example: "I am Jane Smith of 123 Elm Street, a member of Neighbourhood Watch. There is a suspicious female entering into my neighbour's house at 125 Elm Street. She is out of town, and her son is the only one who is supposed to be at the house."*
- Give the exact location of the crime or activity.
- Use active, present tense verbs. *"There is a break and enter in progress" or "There is suspicious activity in progress and there is someone there now..."*
- Remain in contact with the dispatcher until all the necessary information has been obtained.
- Do not personally confront the situation. Await the arrival of a police officer. In an emergency, when reporting an incident to the call taker, you may be asked to repeat the address. This is to ensure that the address is correct and understood. The call taker may ask you questions, which may seem indirectly related to the actual incidence of the crime. In these circumstances a police officer may already have been dispatched to the scene of the emergency, and the additional information that is being asked may be used to determine if there is a need for more emergency equipment.

Care Enough to Call

If any of the above situations are observed and deemed suspicious, call the police and report:

- What has happened
- Where it happened
- When it happened
- If anyone was injured
- License plate information of suspicious vehicle
- Description of suspicious vehicle



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- Description of suspicious person(s)
- In what direction the suspicious vehicle/suspicious person went

What response to expect in regard to your call:

If the crime is in progress, e.g., the suspect is still in your home or your neighbour's home, your call will be answered immediately. When making your call, **BE SURE TO USE THE WORDS "IN PROGRESS!"**

If the crime has already been committed, e.g., you have come home and found your home has been broken into, a slower response should be expected. The first priority in answering calls is for crimes in progress. Once those calls have been answered, the officer will go to the requested location.

Crime should always be reported directly to police, not solely to social media. For low priority reports, consider using the NRPS Online Reporting at <https://www.niagarapolice.ca/>

The Niagara Regional Police Service provides guidance, resources, and direct contact to support organized Neighbourhood Watch groups through the Community Oriented Response and Engagement (CORE) Unit. <https://www.niagarapolice.ca/what-we-do/community-safety/community-oriented-response-engagement-unit/#>

Other Resources:

<https://www.niagarapolice.ca/community/529-garage-community-watch-for-your-bike/>

<https://www.niagarapolice.ca/community/crime-prevention/>

<https://www.niagarapolice.ca/community/auto-theft-prevention/>

<https://www.niagarapolice.ca/what-we-do/road-safety/>

<https://crimestoppersniagara.ca/>

