

# Citizen Involvement in Homeland Security



**A**fter the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush challenged all Americans to become involved in local homeland security efforts. Citizen Corps was created to help citizens actively participate in keeping America safe. Two programs of Citizen Corps—the Neighborhood Watch Program and the Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS)—offer Americans many ways to become involved.

**NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH** has provided citizens with a way to unite against crime in their own communities. Since 1972, when the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) started the National Neighborhood Watch program, Watch groups across the nation have proven repeatedly that ordinary people working together and in cooperation with law enforcement can make a difference—not only in protecting themselves, their families, and their communities from crime but also in building a foundation for broader community improvement. Participating in Neighborhood Watch is an excellent way for us to join with our neighbors to secure not only our communities but also our homeland.

The **VOLUNTEERS IN POLICE SERVICE PROGRAM** helps local law enforcement agencies incorporate community volunteers into agency activities. Since September 11, 2001, the demands on state and local law enforcement have increased dramatically. As a result, the already limited resources of these agencies are being stretched further than ever. As a VIPS volunteer, you can provide support services to law enforcement agencies in your community, allowing them to respond more effectively to homeland security and other policing priorities. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) manages and implements the VIPS Program in partnership with and on behalf of the White House Office of the USA Freedom Corps and the U.S. Department of Justice.



This insert in the *United for a Stronger American: Citizens' Preparedness Guide* will provide you with basic information on each program. For more information, contact

**Neighborhood Watch Program**

National Sheriffs' Association  
1450 Duke Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-3490  
703-836-7827  
703-683-6541 (fax)  
[www.sheriffs.org](http://www.sheriffs.org)  
[www.usaonwatch.org](http://www.usaonwatch.org)

**Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program**

International Association of Chiefs of Police  
515 N. Washington Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
1-800-THE-IACP  
[info@policevolunteers.org](mailto:info@policevolunteers.org)  
[www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org)



## NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM (NWP)

**I**t's easy to participate in Neighborhood Watch. You and your neighbors may already be doing the kinds of activities that Watch groups normally do: beautifying common areas, addressing local traffic problems, and helping victims of crime. As members of Neighborhood Watch, you can contribute to homeland security by being the "eyes" and "ears" of law enforcement; by reporting suspicious behavior in your area; and by helping to create a community disaster preparedness plan.

Watch groups can be as small as a few houses or as large as several blocks. Regardless of a group's size or resources, Neighborhood Watch empowers people to prevent crime, forges bonds between law enforcement and the communities they serve, and builds a foundation for broader community improvement. Ultimately, neighbors helping neighbors is the best way to unite and create a stronger America.

NSA has a Neighborhood Watch Action Kit available at [www.usaonwatch.org](http://www.usaonwatch.org). This kit provides specific information on how to start a Neighborhood Watch; the benefits of participating; and activities to address immediate crime problems, build neighborhood cohesion, and focus on homeland security. Please help NSA meet the President's challenge by registering your new Watch group, or your intention to start a group, on its website.

### HOW TO START A NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

- Talk to your neighbors about crime in the area, possible challenges, and the Neighborhood Watch concept.
- Contact your local police or sheriff's department to discuss Neighborhood Watch and local crime problems. Invite a crime prevention officer to attend your meeting. Give advance notice of your first meeting.
- Publicize your meeting at least one week in advance with a flier or letter of invitation delivered to every home in your area. Follow up with phone calls the day before.



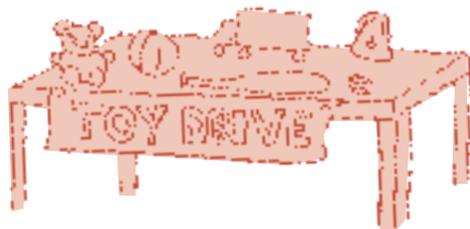
- Select a meeting place that is convenient and also accessible to people with disabilities.
- Hold an initial meeting to gauge neighbors' interest; establish a purpose for the program; and begin to identify issues that need to be addressed.
- If your neighborhood decides to adopt the Watch idea, set a time for another meeting to elect a chairperson and determine block captains.

## **BENEFITS OF NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH**

- Crime is reduced and fear of crime is lessened within a community.
- Local residents feel less helpless and more in control.
- All community members—renters, home owners, teenagers, seniors, parents, business owners—get to know each other as they work together to reduce crime.
- Activities such as sprucing up public spaces, removing trash, and painting over graffiti generate pride and a sense of involvement among community residents.
- Bonds are forged between law enforcement and members of the community that benefit everyone.

## **HOW TO SUSTAIN A WATCH GROUP**

- When crime drops or a neighborhood problem is alleviated, some Watch programs lose their momentum. Keep your program vital by extending its scope beyond the basics of home security.
- Have Watch members brainstorm ways to improve the community's quality of life. Sponsor community cleanups, collect clothing and toys for homeless families, and tutor at-risk teens.
- Plan for and train new leaders and volunteers rather than “burning out” the existing ones. Delegate tasks and be realistic about how many people you need to do a job.
- Keep in touch with members. Use personal contacts and distribute a newsletter to communicate regularly. Plan social events before or after a meeting.
- Provide public recognition of Watch members' achievements through awards and articles in newsletters and newspapers.



## TYPICAL NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH ACTIVITIES

- Clean up playgrounds and vacant lots to discourage their use by drug dealers.
- Train Watch members in home security techniques, observation skills, and crime reporting.
- Post Neighborhood Watch signs, available from law enforcement, in the area.
- Take part in National Night Out, sponsored by the National Association of Town Watch on the first Tuesday of each August, to promote crime prevention through block parties, cookouts, and other local events.
- Start a McGruff House® and/or McGruff Truck® program.
- Volunteer to help with the local high school's truancy prevention program.
- Organize citizen patrols to walk or drive through an area and report suspicious activities to law enforcement.
- Help remove graffiti within 24 hours of its appearance.
- Initiate an Operation Identification program for marking personal property to allow for positive identification if items are lost or stolen.



## ACTIVITIES RELATED TO HOMELAND SECURITY

- Make sure community members know what kind of suspicious activities to look out for and how to report them to law enforcement. Invite a representative from your local law enforcement agency or emergency management office to speak to your Watch group.
- Develop a neighborhood evacuation plan. Create a neighborhood directory with phone numbers and email addresses for all community members, noting contact information and plans for children and seniors who may be home alone during emergency situations.
- Encourage members to develop individual or family emergency preparedness plans.
- Discuss the local warning system and how to find information on evacuation routes and temporary shelters in an emergency.
- Discuss potential terrorist targets in or near your community (e.g., power or chemical plants, airports, bridges) and the consequences of an attack.

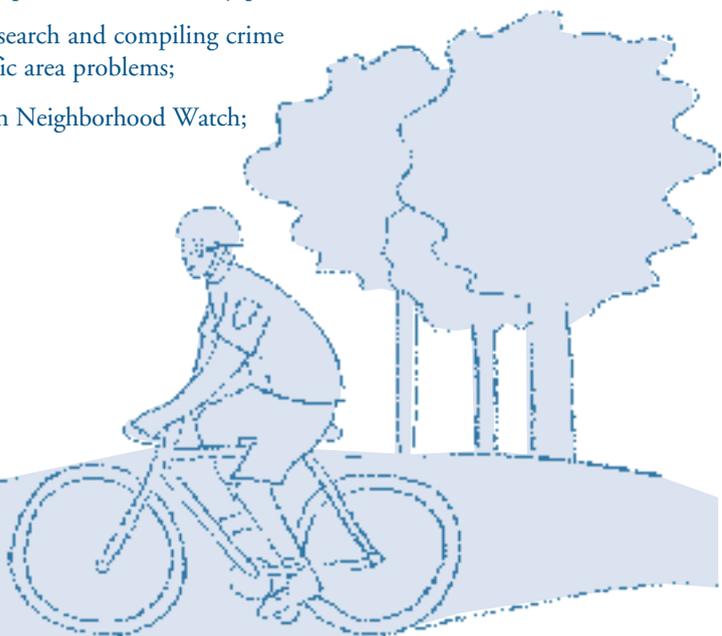
## VOLUNTEERS IN POLICE SERVICE PROGRAM

The VIPS Program's website, [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org), serves as a gateway to information for citizens interested in volunteering with a state or local law enforcement agency in their community. The website includes a searchable database of law enforcement volunteer programs and volunteer opportunities throughout the country. VIPS also offers resources for law enforcement agencies interested in starting or expanding a volunteer program, including a resource manual, a discussion group, and an online resource guide of sample policies and forms.

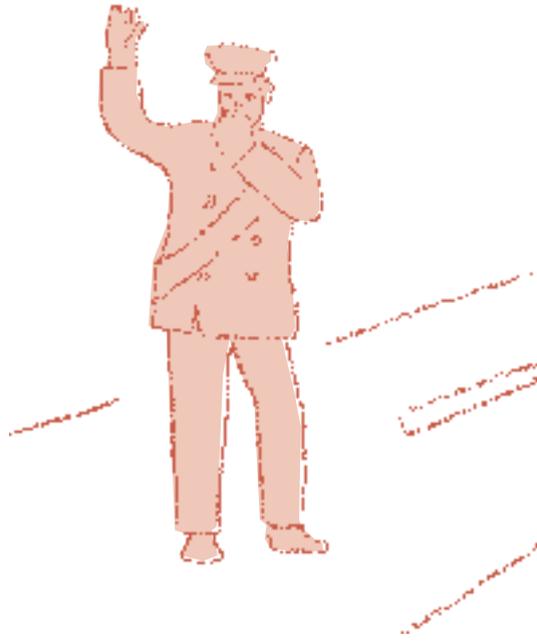
### TYPICAL VIPS VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

There are many ways you can assist a law enforcement agency, including

- providing home safety checks for vacationing residents;
- typing reports, entering data, and other office tasks;
- staffing community policing substations;
- providing bike patrols in community parks;
- conducting research and compiling crime data for specific area problems;
- participating in Neighborhood Watch;



- assisting front counter personnel by answering citizen inquiries and directing citizens to the proper police unit;
- providing traffic/crowd control;
- assisting with special events;
- patrolling shopping centers to assist stranded motorists or lost children;
- writing citations for handicap parking violations;
- providing short-term care of juveniles in protective custody;
- participating in search-and-rescue activities;
- participating in role-plays and training scenarios;
- staffing a department booth and distributing information on police services at community events;
- assisting the telephone reporting unit in taking reports of minor and “no suspect” crimes (e.g., theft from auto);
- participating in a Citizens Advisory Board;
- becoming reserve or auxiliary officers; and
- joining an Explorer Post if you are a youth interested in a law enforcement career.



Law enforcement agencies also strive to match your specialized skills with their own needs. For example:

- Counselors can provide support to victims of crime and assist with crisis intervention.
- Mechanics can help maintain police vehicles.

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- Faith leaders can become involved in a Chaplain Program.
  - University researchers, statisticians, and criminologists can help law enforcement agencies conduct research.
  - Public health officials can help officers develop public safety plans and train for biohazards.
  - Security specialists can conduct free security reviews for local schools, afterschool programs, or places of worship.
  - Marketers and artists can help local law enforcement design community public safety campaigns.
  - Bilingual individuals can assist with translation.
  - Computer programmers can help develop or improve websites and records management systems.

The specific volunteer opportunities offered will vary from agency to agency. You can find out what opportunities are offered in your community by visiting [www.policevolunteers.org](http://www.policevolunteers.org) or by contacting your local law enforcement agency.

For more information on preventing crime or how to get involved in crime prevention activities, contact

**National Crime Prevention Council**

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Washington, DC 20036

202-466-6272

202-296-1356 (fax)

[www.weprevent.org](http://www.weprevent.org)

[www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)