

ISSDA Encourages Vigilance Through Community Programs

The Neighborhood Watch program was developed by the National Sheriff's Association (NSA) in response to requests from Sheriffs and Police Chiefs around the country. Law enforcement leaders were looking for a crime prevention program that would incorporate citizen involvement, and address the increasing number of burglaries taking place - especially in rural and suburban residential areas.

Your local Sheriff and the ISSDA offer these tips to become proactive in your community by organizing a Neighborhood Watch Program:

Understand from the very beginning that you must be organized to be effective, and that you must stay organized.

Identify two or three of your neighbors who are willing to get involved.

Hold a meeting in someone's home and determine if an active Neighborhood Watch Program is something in which each person is willing to become involved.

Conduct a detailed survey of your neighborhood. Make notes about how serious the problems are and where your first attentions should be focused.

Contact the Sheriff's Office for the name of your beat coordinator. This is an officer responsible for your area of the city. Contact your beat coordinator and ask if he or she will attend your next meeting.

At your next meeting, introduce yourself and the other neighbors in the program. Explain to the officer what you feel are areas needing attention and ask for recommendations on how to actively patrol the streets in the neighborhood, on foot and in cars.

Provide a list of names and addresses of your patrollers to the beat coordinator.

Often the best method in utilizing a neighborhood watch is simply to pay attention to strangers and strange activities. If anything looks unusual, check first to see if all is well with your neighbor, and then, if necessary, call the Sheriff's Office.

Find out from your local Sheriff's Office if organizing a neighborhood patrol by car or foot is acceptable, and work with a liaison officer to set up proper protocol and a specific schedule.

Two-way radios ("walkie-talkies"), citizen band radios or portable cellular phones could be useful by the Watch.

Find out if any members of the group, or any of your neighbors, has a scanner and can listen to the police frequencies. These units are not expensive and are available from Radio Shack and many other sources.

Scanners usually can be programmed to listen to the frequencies of any walkie-talkie equipment you may elect to use. One person monitoring at home, near a phone, can act as your contact to the Sheriff's Office.

Make up a letter asking for volunteers. Deliver a copy to each home in the neighborhood area you intend to patrol.

Once you start your patrol, report any suspicious activity to law officers. Always use common sense. Never put yourself or others at risk.

You should try and patrol as a team, particularly on Friday nights and on weekends.

A good online resource for information is the National Sheriff's Association Neighborhood Watch Program at www.sheriffs.org then click on the link for Crime Prevention.