

# NEIGHBORHOOD



# WATCH

## CITIZEN'S HANDBOOK

*"Neighbors looking out for Neighbors"*

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Flowery Branch Police Department  
5270 Railroad Avenue  
Flowery Branch, GA 30542

**Dear Neighbor,**

**Thank you for your interest in the Flowery Branch Police Department's Neighborhood Watch Program. Your willingness and desire to become involved in preventing crime and/or addressing existing issues through proactive behavior is the first step toward making our community a better and safer place to live, work, and play.**

**We here at the Flowery Branch Police Department recognize that successful crime prevention relies heavily on a partnership between law enforcement professionals and the citizens they serve. Our dilemma is that we are unable to be in all places at all times, so we count on you, concerned citizens, to be our "eyes and ears". Plainly speaking we can't do this without you.**

**This program emphasizes effective communication methods, observation skills, and a proactive mindset. This handbook gives the reader a solid overview of the program, how to organize your own neighborhood watch, and keep it going so that it is a viable crime deterrent.**

**Ultimately, the goal of Neighborhood Watch is to create a safe community through communication with law enforcement professionals. We would like to create a city where we can all feel safe and secure. With your help, *together we can make a difference.***

**Sincerely,**

**Interim Chief Chris Hulse**

# **Neighborhood Watch History**

**Neighborhood watch is one of the oldest and best-known crime prevention concepts in North America. In the late 1960's, an increase in crime heightened the need for a crime prevention initiative that focused on residential areas and the involvement of local citizens. The National Sheriff's Association responded, creating the Neighborhood Watch Program in 1972 to assist citizens and law enforcement.**

**In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, strengthening and securing communities has become more critical than ever. Neighborhood Watch programs have responded to the challenge, expanding beyond their traditional crime prevention role to help neighborhoods focus on disaster preparedness, emergency response and terrorism awareness.**

**In 2002, the National Sheriff's Association, in partnership with USA Freedom Corps, Citizen Corps, and the U.S. Department of Justice launched "USA on Watch." This was the face of the revitalized Neighborhood Watch initiative, which represents the expanded role of watch programs throughout the United States.**

# **What is Neighborhood Watch?**

**Let's begin by determining what Neighborhood Watch *is NOT*....**

**Neighborhood Watch *is not* an effort to create a private police force within your community or to foster a vigilante atmosphere. It *is not* the intention of the Flowery Branch Police Department to encourage citizens to place themselves in harm's way when dealing with potential criminal activity.**

**However, Neighborhood Watch *is* an effective crime deterrent by partnering with the Flowery Branch Police Department and acting as our "Eyes and Ears" on the street. This enables citizens to take an active role in the protection of their neighborhood and the community.**

**As part of this partnership, the Flowery Branch Police Department will help train those citizens in observation, reporting techniques, and crime prevention. Additionally, neighborhoods involved in the Watch program will be kept informed of criminal or suspicious activity in their neighborhood and entire community by way of the Neighborhood Watch communication network.**

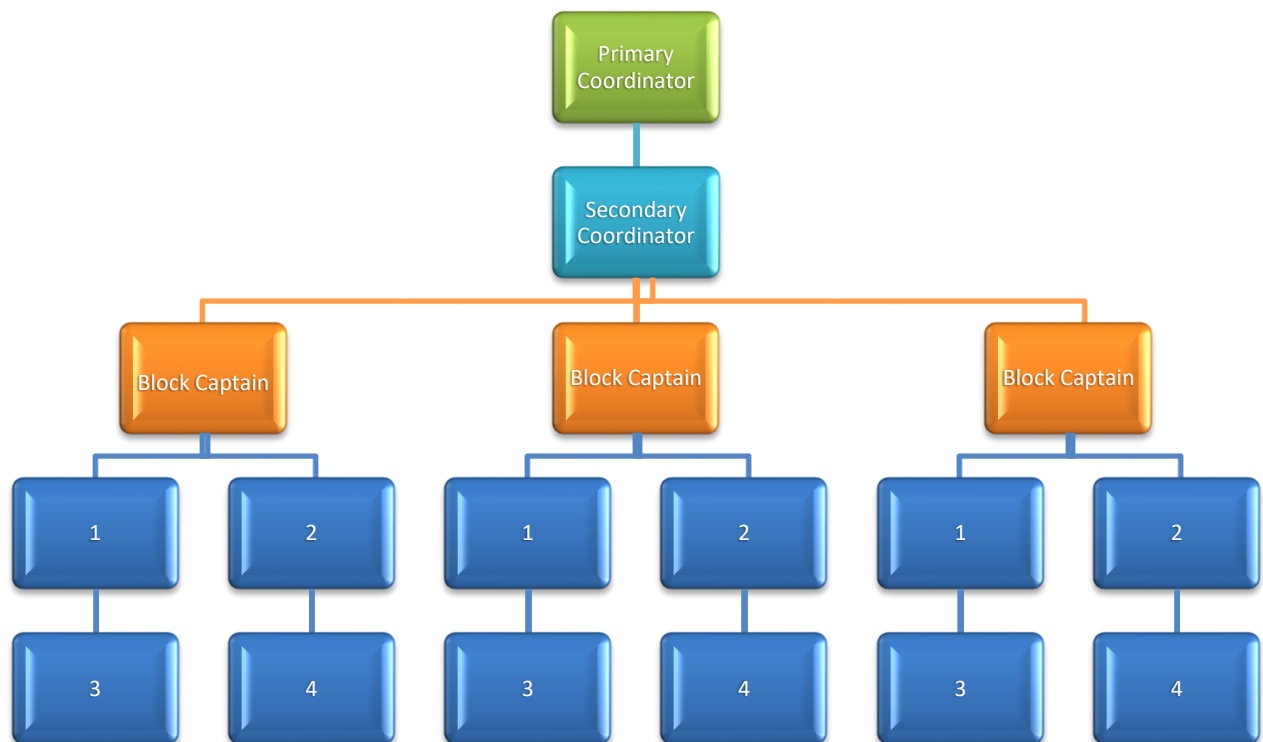
# Neighborhood Watch Basics

**Neighborhood Watch does not have to be a complicated endeavor. With a minimum of effort, a community can establish their program and make it successful by focusing on these three building blocks.**



# Organization

**A simple organizational structure will feature a primary and a secondary Neighborhood Watch Coordinator, Block Captains, and the participating residents. This structure ensures thorough dissemination of information and also delegates some of the responsibilities so that a single person doesn't shoulder every task.**



# **Neighborhood Watch Coordinator**

**The coordinator serves as the primary point of contact for the Flowery Branch Police Department in matters pertaining to the Neighborhood Watch program.**



**He or she is responsible for recruiting a secondary coordinator, block captains, and to oversee the program in general. The duties will include, but may not be limited to facilitating communications among active residents,**

**scheduling meetings, as well as ensuring the program remains viable.**

## **Block Captains**

**Block Captains serve as intermediaries between the Coordinator and participating residents. Each block captain will typically have a small number of homes in their immediate vicinity that they are responsible for conveying up to date contact information and passing along communications.**



**This lessens the burden on the Coordinator by delegating some of the responsibility of maintaining contact with every resident (this is important in many of the larger neighborhoods). Assigning a block captain to each street, or**



**every six to eight households, for instance, allows communications to flow much more rapidly.**

## **Communications**

**One of the keys to a successful Neighborhood Watch program is an effective communications network. We encourage a two way flow of information between participants and the Crime Prevention Office. It is through this system that the Flowery Branch Police Department can stay abreast of any potential problems in a neighborhood and hopefully address those issues before it requires a call to 9-1-1.**



**The Flowery Branch Police Department will keep neighborhoods up to date by sending out email bulletins on local crime trends, important alerts or look-outs, and crime prevention tips. With a well thought out means of**

**communications, the Crime Prevention officer will have the ability to communicate in real time.**

## **Communications... How it Works**

### ***Receiving Communications from the Police Department***

**When the Police Department has important information to pass along to program participants that is not of an emergency nature, such as a crime prevention tip or information regarding local crime trends, an email distribution list is utilized. The Crime Prevention Officer will send the communication to each neighborhood's primary and secondary neighborhood watch coordinator. The coordinator then sends that email to the neighborhood's block captains, who in turn pass it along to each of their participating residents.**

**In the case of an emergency communication, a phone tree alert may be activated. The Crime Prevention Officer will call the coordinator and ask him or her to call their neighborhood's participants to pass along urgent**

**information. Generally, this is reserved for situations that could affect the health, safety, or possibly aid law enforcement in the capture of a wanted person who may be in the area, etc.**

## **Communications... How it Works**

### ***Neighborhood Watch Initiated Communications***

**At some point, there may be an incident or some type of activity in your neighborhood that warrants the attention of the Police Department. First and foremost,**

***IF THE SITUATION IS AN EMERGENCY CALL 9-1-1***

**Once dispatch has been notified and the appropriate response is underway, notify the neighborhood coordinator who will in turn notify the other neighborhood watch participants if necessary. The coordinator should then notify the Crime Prevention Officer so the incident information can be added to the neighborhood's file.**

**If the communication generated by a participant is not of an emergency nature, but still requires the attention of law enforcement, such as a suspicious person or vehicle, a Police**

**Officer should be requested by calling dispatch at (770)536-8812. Be sure to follow-up by keeping the neighborhood watch coordinator informed so the information is disseminated throughout the neighborhood and the Crime Prevention Officer is also advised.**

## **Observation & Reporting**

**No one knows a neighborhood as well as its residents. That is why we emphasize that a successful Neighborhood Watch program is one where the residents take on a proactive role. A Patrolman can drive down your street and see every car in every driveway, but he or she has no idea if those cars actually belong at those houses. They also don't know if the person standing in the garage is the resident or a criminal looking for a home to burglarize, but the neighbors know, and we count on those people to be our "eyes & ears."**

**The bottom line: *KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS!***



## **Observation**

**What do we mean when we say, “Neighbors looking out for neighbors?”**

**Essentially, suspicious activity can be loosely defined as anything that is out of the ordinary for the place, time of day, or person(s) involved. Bottom line, no one knows YOUR neighborhood better than the families who reside in it.**

**A few specific things to be mindful of:**

- **Persons that may be “scouting” or “casing” the neighborhood under the guise of door-to-door solicitation (lawn care, gutter cleaning, pressure washing, tree cutting, promotional sales, just to name a few).**
- **Unusual sounds such as glass or wood breaking, which might be an indicator of a door or window being broken in.**
- **Property being removed from the homes.**

**Also be on the lookout for:**

- **Unknown vehicles slowly cruising through the neighborhood**
- **Someone sitting in a parked car for no apparent reason**
- **Any person being dropped off or picked up along the street, with no obvious destination**
- **Someone on foot, looking into vehicles or homes**
- **Abandoned or unattended vehicles- this could be an indicator of someone in the area on foot, possibly engaging in illegal activity**
- **Deceptive activity- Perhaps you’re walking in the neighborhood and you notice a stranger in a driveway or standing near a vehicle, and when that person realizes**

**that you have spotted them they turn and walk away or make a veiled attempt at hiding**

- **Unusual activity in isolated areas or problem spots such as cul-de-sacs, neighborhood clubhouses or pools, etc**

**When observing any type of criminal act or suspicious person or activity, it's important to be able to describe the person or vehicle with as much detail as possible. Unfortunately, these events are sometimes a high-stress experience for citizens and remembering what to look for is usually the last thing on your mind. Here are the basics:**

### **Suspect Description:**

**Make note of the person's sex, race, age, height, weight, hair color and length, clothing, and any distinctive characteristics that you see (facial hair, eye glasses, scars, tattoos, etc.)**



### **Vehicle Description:**

**Make note of the make, model, color, tag number if at all possible, and any distinctive characteristics such as special decals, body damage, aftermarket accessories, etc.**

### **Additional Observation Tips:**

- **When reporting a suspicious person or vehicle, always report the last known location and direction of travel. This will greatly help the responding Officers in their search.**
- **Keep a notepad and pen handy so that you won't have to rely solely upon memory when it's time to give a description to a dispatcher or Officer. Be sure to keep it in an easily accessible location in your home, such as on the refrigerator, in a kitchen drawer, or any place that**



**you might be in a position to observe suspicious activity. Also put one in the glove compartment of your vehicle.**

- **Cell phone cameras are another useful observation and reporting tool. If you're in a position to do so without putting yourself in an unsafe situation, take a photo of the vehicle or person.**



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## **Reporting**

- **A statement that Law Enforcement Officers often hear from citizens is, “I didn’t call you guys because I just didn’t think it was a big deal,” or, “I really didn’t want to bother an officer with this.” Unfortunately, these**

**comments are sometimes made after an incident where the information that those citizens had may have been helpful in preventing a crime.**

**This mindset is all too common. Let us be clear on this point:**

**Report all criminal or suspicious activity to the Police Department!**

**Law Enforcement activity is to some degree driven by statistical data. In other words, if the Police Department doesn't receive a report of criminal activity, it obviously doesn't get recorded and the Patrol Officers working that area may never know that there is criminal activity afoot. The more reports received in any given area, the more patrol activity that area is likely to see.**

**Emergency v. non-emergency... what number do I call?**

**Many citizens are concerned that something such as a suspicious person or vehicle doesn't warrant a call to 9-1-1. There are several non-emergency lines to Hall County dispatchers, the most common being the number below:**

**(770)536-8812**

**If you have this number handy and utilize it for non-emergencies, that is great. Although, if you can't remember the number or do not have time to look it up and you need an officer, simply call 9-1-1. No one will be upset with you for doing so!**



## **Incident Follow-up**

**So now you've had some type of incident that requires the Police Department to respond. What happens next? Depending on how serious and what type of incident it was,**

**you may be asked by an officer or investigator to provide a written statement or even look through a photo lineup (comprised of several “mug shots”) at a later time. Many people shy away from these things because they fear having to go to court later. To that we have this to say: Don’t let the fear of going to court deter you from taking action to preserve the safety & security of your home and neighborhood. You’ve come this far, we need you to follow through to help resolve the problem.**

**Beyond that, what do you do now in regard to your Neighborhood Watch program? It’s really quite simple. If the neighborhood coordinator isn’t already aware of the situation, be sure that he or she gets all the information. Other neighbors will be made aware of it, and the Crime Prevention Officer can be notified so the neighborhood’s file is kept up to date.**

**Finally, remain vigilant. Maintaining a safe community is everyone’s duty, and one that requires an on-going commitment.**

## **Maintaining a Healthy Neighborhood Watch**

**It is not uncommon for a Neighborhood Watch program to generate a lot of interest in the beginning (particularly if there has recently been a rash of crime in the area), and then lose steam as time goes by. This is to be expected to some degree, but there are things you can do to keep your neighborhood's program active and effective.**

- **Spread the word. Some of your neighbors might not know about the program. The next time you see them outside, stop by and let them know about it, and tell them how to get involved.**
- **Make crime prevention topics a regular feature in your neighborhood's newsletter. While there is always other business to be addressed, save a little space for a crime prevention or safety tips.**
- **Arrange other crime prevention presentations with the Police Department. Many topics of interest are available. Contact your crime prevention officer for details.**

## **Protecting your Home**

**There are many ways to improve the physical security of your home. Let's take a look at a few things that are simple to address.**

## **Door Locks**

- **Ensure that exterior doors have a deadbolt that sets at least 1.5" into the frame.**
- **Double-Keyed deadbolt sets are preferred where the building codes allow. Be sure not to leave the key in the interior lock if there are windows in the door that would allow a burglar to reach inside and simply turn it.**
- **Replace the factory supplied screws that hold the strike plate with 3" wood screws to ensure that they reach beyond the soft wood of the doorjamb and into the frame of the house itself.**

## **Window locks**

- **Most residential window locks are of the inexpensive, thumb-latch variety. While simple to use and**

**aesthetically pleasing, they really don't provide much in the way of security. There are a number of commercially made window locks that greatly increase the security of a double hung window (the most common type found in homes), but one of the simplest of all methods is simply to "pin" the windows by drilling a hole through the inside sash and about half of the way into the exterior sash. Then simply slip a nail or similar sized pin into the hole. Now if a burglar tries to open the window, the pins will hold the two halves together. The window can still be broken of course, just as a door with a good lock can still be kicked, but a criminal will have to make a lot of noise in doing these things, and noise attracts unwanted attention.**

## **Lighting**

- **Position exterior lights near all entrances, and it's also preferable to have lights in place so that any side of the house can be illuminated as needed. Motion lights are a great way to illuminate your home's exterior only when needed, thereby reducing costs on power bills.**

## **Landscaping**

- **Keep all shrubbery and plants trimmed to a modest height to eliminate potential hiding places (particularly**

**near the entrances) for someone trying to break in or even worse, planning a personal attack upon you as you arrive or depart.**

**The more visible your home is to the outside world, the less attractive it is to criminals!**



## **Safeguarding your Property**

**In the event that you are the victim of theft, it's important to be able to identify your property. Placing your initials, your**



**“mark”, or the last four digits of you social security number, anything that allows you to give an accurate, particular, description of *your* property. Police evidence rooms are filled with items that were recovered from criminals, but can’t be returned to their owners. This is because no identifying marks or characteristics were recorded that could later be used to locate and contact the owners.**

***Operation Identification* is a nationally recognized burglary prevention effort by law enforcement and the insurance industry to detect, identify, and return stolen property to the rightful owner.**

- **The program involves marking or engraving personal belongings with a distinctive number that can be recorded, reported if stolen, and traces by law enforcement.**
- **Record all serial numbers or Operation ID numbers and keep the list in a safe place (not on your home computer in case it is also stolen).**
- **Display an “Operation Identification” decal (available commercially).**

## **Vehicle Security**

**One of the crimes that we see quite often in residential neighborhoods is what law enforcement refers to as “Entering Auto,” which is when someone enters a vehicle to commit a theft, forced or otherwise. In Georgia, entering auto is a felony crime, regardless of what the perpetrator steals.**

- **Always lock your vehicle even in your own driveway. Most entering auto cases happen at the owner’s home, at night, with unlocked cars being the target.**
- **It is common for perpetrators to move through a subdivision on foot, going house-to-house, checking for unlocked cars as they go. Forced entry is not common place here in our neighborhoods. The most common perpetrators don’t typically want to break a window for fear of making too much noise and attracting unwanted attention.**
- **Vehicles that have valuable items in plain sight are prime targets; never store valuables in your car.**
- **Never store a weapon in your locked or unlocked vehicle.**

**For More Information**

**For more information on starting a Neighborhood Watch program, contact:**

**Flowery Branch Police Department**

**Crime Preventions and Community Service Unit**



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