



## Neighborhood Watches and Citizens on Patrol *Community Guides*

For community residents and local law enforcement looking for tools to help improve the safety of their communities, two ideas have gain tremendous momentum nationally as a way of preventing crime.

### **Citizens on Patrol**

Citizens On Patrol, or C.O.P.'s, are citizens who patrol their communities acting as "Eyes and Ears" for law enforcement. By patrolling their community, on a regular basis, usually in 4-8 hour shifts, C.O.P volunteers become more familiar with their community and are better able to recognize "suspicious" activity and notify the authorities. Other common duties performed by C.O.P groups is traffic control at accident scenes, special events, crime scenes, fires, in addition to focused patrols in high crime areas for deterrence. By utilizing C.O.P. groups for such basic yet needed tasks, Police and Sheriffs are able to spend more time on patrol and focus on their primary mission.



Additionally, C.O.P. groups offer communities and law enforcement agencies cost savings. It is not uncommon for an average size Citizen Patrol group of 50 members to provide a budget savings of several hundred thousand dollars a year by performing these duties. Volunteers for organized C.O.P. programs initially receive a background check and training from their local law enforcement department which may include topics such as: First aid, CPR, Introduction to Law, Patrol Procedures, Traffic Control, Crime Prevention, Use of

Two-Way Radios, Defensive Driver Training in addition to other topics. The National Association Citizens On Patrol was founded by, and for, Citizen Patrol Volunteers and is dedicated to supporting the use and growth of Citizen Patrol groups.

### **Neighborhood Watch**

The modern version of Neighborhood Watch was sponsored by the National Sheriffs' Association and developed in response to requests from sheriffs and police chiefs who were looking for a crime prevention program that would involve citizens and address an increasing number of burglaries. Neighborhood Watch counts on citizens to organize themselves and work with law enforcement to keep a trained eye and ear on their communities, while demonstrating their presence at all times of day and night.

Neighborhood Watches are usually formed from a small planning committee of neighbors that discuss the needs of their community and gage the level of interest and potential problems. After these community groups decided to start a Neighborhood Watch, they hold an initial Neighborhood Watch meeting and contact their local police department or sheriff's office to notify

them of their interest to start a Neighborhood Watch. Once they establish a partnership with local law enforcement, the local police department or sheriff's office supplies initial training of volunteers in areas such as home security, crime reporting, property marking, other Neighborhood Watch basics.

USAOnWatch advises that Neighborhood Watch Programs can be started in 5 easy steps:

1. Recruit and Organize as many neighbors as possible
2. Contact your local law enforcement agency and schedule a meeting
3. Discuss community concerns and develop an action plan
4. Hold regular meetings and train
5. Implement a phone tree and take action steps



### **What's the Difference?**

Both C.O.P.'s and Neighborhood Watches are very similar in the role that they play in the community. Both advocate for an increased role in crime prevention by neighborhood residents. While some C.O.P. programs have their volunteers wear police-like uniforms, both groups have their members wear distinctive clothing to be recognized by neighborhood residents. Neighborhood Watch programs can include citizen patrols, but also involve activities to help neighborhood residents increase their awareness of the community. It is important to note that neither C.O.P.'s nor Neighborhood Watches are vigilantes. They do not take enforcement action, are not authorized to carry weapons, and are encouraged to avoid physical contact. Rather, they only observe and report. The biggest difference between C.O.P programs and Neighborhood Watches is that Citizen Patrol programs are initiated and sponsored by local law enforcement, and Neighborhood Watches are organized and managed by community residents.

### **How do I Start One?**

To start a C.O.P or a Neighborhood Watch, contact the National Association Citizens on Patrol, USAOnWatch, or the National Crime Prevention Council. Their websites are listed below.

### **Resources**

National Association Citizens on Patrol: <http://www.nacop.org/>

USAOnWatch: <http://www.usaonwatch.org/>

National Crime Prevention Council: <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/home-and-neighborhood-safety/neighborhood-watch/>

National Neighborhood Watch Institute: <http://www.nnwi.org/>