Parkersburg / Wood County Neighborhood Watch Co-op

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

How to Detect Suspicious Activities

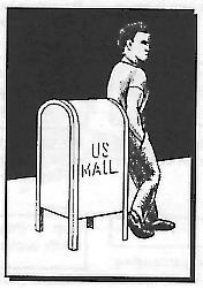
We live in a world where there are unlimited numbers of people, things, and situations that could be considered suspicious. This SOP outlines some general principles regarding what you should consider as a suspicious person, activity, or circumstance.

WHAT IS A SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY?

A suspicious activity occurs when a person's conduct or action *does not* fit the norm of your neighborhood or the surrounding circumstances. It is when your attention is drawn to a person's conduct that is unusual, different, odd, dangerous, appears wrongful, or "just not right" under the circumstances. A suspicious activity is an occurrence that is out of place and should not be happening in your neighborhood under normal circumstances. For example, you see in the middle of the night a truck parked down your street with two people loading furniture and other things of value into it. You further observe that there are no lights on at the residence from which the furniture is being taken. Obviously, this is a suspicious activity. People don't usually move furniture in the middle of the night, especially when the lights are out. If you were to observe such a suspicious activity you should *immediately call law enforcement* as there would be a high probability that burglars were breaking into your neighbor's house.

Appearance of Suspicion

Understand that your interpretation that an activity is suspicious is *in and of itself enough for you to call the police*. There could be, of course, and often are, reasonable explanations for seemingly suspicious activities. Your only duty, however, is to *call the police when you think that something is wrong*. Your local law enforcement officer is the one who will make the determination of whether or not something is wrong. Remember, you are not the one to investigate what you think is suspicious. That is a job for the police. Your responsibility as a Neighborhood Watcher is to let them know about the suspicious activity. *You should call the police any time you think there is something suspicious, dangerous, or wrongful going on. No exceptions!* You do not have to give your name to report your findings to local law enforcement, but we strongly recommend that you give your name, identify yourself as a member of Neighborhood Watch, and wait for law enforcement to arrive in case they have any questions to ask you.



Use Your Intuition

Detecting suspicious activities requires you to make a judgment about what you are observing. *Use your intuition — your gut-level feeling*. If you think or feel something is wrong or suspicious, it probably is. By *using your head*, and *thinking*, you will be able to make a reasonably good judgment about whether an activity is suspicious or not. ***If you are in doubt, call the police.***

COMMON SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES

Here are some examples of common suspicious activities.

Observation: When a person or vehicle stays in the same location for a long or unusual period of time.	**Possible Activities:** Many kinds of criminal activity could result from this suspicious activity, such as waiting to transact a drug deal, acting as a lookout for a criminal act being committed, a sex deviate waiting to pick up a victim, a criminal "casing" a house, business, or other location as a potential target. On the other hand, the supposed suspicious person may be sick either physically, or mentally and unable to help themselves. On the other hand, it may well be someone waiting to take a person home from work, or it may even be a police stakeout. When in doubt, call the police.
Observation: A person who behaves strangely or whose movements are unusual.	**Possible Activities:** A criminal preparing for or committing a crime. A person under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Someone who is hurt, sick, or injured. Someone mentally deranged or ill.
Observation: A vehicle (car, truck, van, etc.) frequently driving around your block or within a specific area.	**Possible Activities:** It could be a criminal(s) waiting to commit a crime at an appropriate or specific time. The vehicle could be the get-away car for a criminal act being committed or in progress. the vehicle could be driven by a sex offender, trying to pick up a victim.
Observation: People carrying, concealing, or attempting to conceal something suspicious.	**Possible Activities:** Transporting stolen property, concealing a weapon such as a knife or gun, concealing contraband (illegal things like drugs, etc.). *However*, remember that wearing a firearm, either openly or concealed, is perfectly legal within the state of West Virginia and should not be considered suspicious without other extenuating circumstances. Likewise, a person walking down a rural road carrying a long gun (rifle or shotgun) during hunting season is *not* suspicious. On the other hand, a person carrying a long gun in town near a school might very well be considered suspicious. If you are going to err, be sure to err on the side of safety and caution.
Observation: People wearing clothes that are messed up, torn, missing, or their attire (jewelry and personal effects) do not fit the individual.	**Possible Activities:** The person(s) could have recently been involved in a crime either as a perpetrator or a victim. A person who looks like a "bum" could have just stolen some expensive item (piece of jewelry) and is now wearing it.

Observation: A car or other vehicle traveling or parked in your neighborhood that is heavily weighed down and is obviously carrying something heavy or in bulk.	**Possible Activities:** The vehicle is being used to transport, sell, or deliver stolen property to another. A burglar is transporting the property that has just been stolen.
Observation: A person who stops people on the street.	**Possible Activities:** The individual could be panhandling (asking for money — illegal in many states, but legal in Parkersburg and Wood County), or soliciting for sexual acts or prostitution, trying to sell stolen merchandise, or a mentally challenged troublemaker trying to start a fight or other problems. On the other hand, the person may be lost and asking for directions. Keep watching and decide.
Observation: An older man in the company of younger females or teenagers.	**Possible Activities:** Older male serving as a "connection" (i.e., a source of supply for something illegal like alcohol, drugs, etc.). Male may be seeking sex or sexual deviation with underage female (or male). Male is harboring a young female runaway. The older male is pimping (soliciting for prostitution) for the younger girls. On the other hand, it may only be a grandfather out walking with his grandchildren. Keep watching and decide.
Observation: Occupants that are unusually seated in a parked car or moving vehicle. That is, two people in a car, one person seated in the driver's seat and another in the back seat.	**Possible Activities:** Car is being used in the commission of a crime; it could be a get-away car for a robbery in progress. The car may be being used for the transaction of illegal activity like prostitution or drug sales.
Observation: Gangs or groups of young people or adults gathering together at a specific location.	**Possible Activities:** The gang is together to encounter another gang in a "gang fight." A massive group drug transaction is occurring. The group is simply congregating together for no purpose expect to fool around and talk, which usually leads to eventual trouble.
Observation: A person looking into cars and/or moving from car to car.	**Possible Activities:** Person may be looking for an unlocked car to steal cash or objects for sale to buy drugs. Person is looking for property inside the car to steal, attempting to enter the car to steal it, or hiding inside the car to rob the driver or hijack the car.
Observation: A car without its lights on during the night,	**Possible Activities:** The car is arriving for or leaving from the commission of a crime such as a burglary, and the suspect doesn't want the license number or description

that is departing from or arriving at a location.	of the car to be observed. The car is being stolen and the thief wants to keep stealing it as unnoticeably as possible.
Observation: A car that is being driven in a damaged or unusual condition. Damage could be to the front of the car caused by a recent accident; bullet holes in the car; the body of the car is being driven in an obviously unsafe condition.	**Possible Activities:** The car could have just been involved in a hit and run accident or been involved in a crime.
Observation: A driver commits traffic violations, speeding or driving in an erratic or reckless manner.	**Possible Activities:** The driver may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or does not know how to drive a car. The person may be escaping from a crime, or the car has just been stolen. The person driving the car is a reckless driver and has no consideration for public safety or traffic laws.
Observation: An individual who does not fit the car they are driving, or is having trouble operating the car they are driving.	**Possible Activities:** The car has been, or is being, stolen.
Observation: A person(s) transporting something unusual or a valuable object during the night	**Possible Activities:** A burglar carrying away stolen property or things used in the commission of a crime. Transportation of illegal things such as contraband, illegal weapons, or other illegal devices or materials.
Observation: A person who is selling or conducting business out of his car, van, truck, or other vehicle.	**Possible Activities:** Selling drugs, stolen merchandise, or just an unlicensed vendor selling merchandise without a license.
Observation: A car is parked, and the engine is still running.	**Possible Activities:** A getaway car for a crime in progress, such as a robbery. If there are no occupants while the engine is running, it will constitute a vehicle code violation in most states. Or it simply may be someone warming up their car on a cold morning before going to work.
Observation: A person or group of people dressed in criminal attire or clothing that could start or provoke trouble	**Possible Activities:** A person wearing dark clothes, gloves, and black tennis shoes during the night is common attire for a burglar. Person(s) wearing gang insignia, patches, jackets, headbands, or “colors.”

	Person(s) wearing outlaw motorcycle gang jackets, insignia, or other outfits. Religious and political extremists wearing or carrying symbols, insignias, or pictures of their leader that is obviously hostile to the community in general. Person(s) wearing dark glasses during evening hours. Such persons could be under the influence of narcotics or other dangerous drugs.
Observation: A person running at night for no apparent reason.	**Possible Activities:** The person may have just committed a crime or illegal act and is attempting to run away. The person could be the intended victim of a crime fleeing from his attackers. The person could be seeking emergency help for a variety of urgent situations. Or the person may just be jogging at night to avoid the heat of the day.
ACTION THAT YOU SHOULD TAKE	Obtain the description(s) of the individual(s), what they are doing, and what they are wearing. When appropriate, call the police and give them this information.
Immediately call the police if you observe suspicious activities of any kind	

SUSPICIOUS SOUNDS

Sounds are very important clues as to suspicious, criminal, or dangerous activities within your neighborhood. Here is a list of some common sounds you should be aware of.

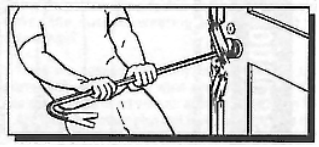
Screaming. Beware if you hear screaming from anyone, especially continuous loud screaming. This probably means that somebody is being hurt, mistreated, or is in trouble. Try to determine where the sound is coming from and *immediately call the police*.

Loud Music. Loud music is not only an annoyance to a neighborhood, but also may be used to cover up someone's wrongful conduct, such as domestic violence. Beware is you all of a sudden hear screaming or yelling immediately followed by loud music. *Immediately call the police.*

Yelling for Help. When you hear someone yelling for help, always assume it is real and that the person needs help. Try to determine where the person is, what his/her problem is, and then *immediately call the police*.

An Alarm Going Off. Fire, burglar, and car alarms, etc., should be investigated as real (not a "false alarm") until the police have investigated the situation and determined otherwise.

Breaking Glass. Beware if you hear the sound of breaking glass, as this is a common method used by criminals to gain entry into houses or vehicles.



Prying, Pounding, or Forcing Sounds. Any sound that indicates that something is being pried, pounded, forced, or broken should immediately arouse your suspicions.

Someone Being Hit or Beaten. *Immediately call the police* if you hear what appears to be someone being hit, beaten, or knocked around by another; sounds like "Oh's" or "Ow's," etc.

Gun Shot Sounds. Any sounds that appear to be that of gun shots should be reported to the police, but be especially cautious between July 1 and July 5. If it sounds like fireworks on these days, it is probably fireworks.

IMMEDIATELY CALL THE POLICE IF YOU OBSERVE SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES OF ANY KIND