Parkersburg / Wood County Neighborhood Watch Co-op

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

How to Observe and Report

"WE LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER" is the key to Neighborhood Watch success.

FORM REQUIRED

Incident Report Form

OBSERVATION

Observation, looking out for each other, is a skill honed through diligent practice. Watching includes both *seeing* suspicious activity and *listening* for suspicious sound. For all *life-threatening* emergencies, *immediately* call 911. To contact police, fire department, or ambulance for *non*-life-threatening events, call (304) 485-8501. *When in doubt, call 911.* Here are ten good tips on how to observe:

1. Knowledge

By knowing who belongs in each house, their hours of work, their vehicles, and/or helpers who come into their homes regularly, you can observe what is happening in your neighborhood and easily become suspicious of anything that does not fit your neighbors' habits.

2. Secrecy

Observe as secretly as possible. If something suspicious is happening, do not make the suspicious person aware that you are watching them. Look out for your neighbor — be the eyes, and the ears, of your local law enforcement agency. But remember, you are the eyes and ears, not the strong arm of the law. Never confront a suspect. Call 911.

3. At Home

You are the eyes and ears, not the strong arm, of the law.

Observe from your home. Whether you live in a house, a mobile home, an apartment, or a condominium, you are the one determining which locations are best for observing normal and suspicious activity. Ideal locations for observing include, but are not limited to, upstairs windows, windows that face the street, windows that allow you to observe the alley, garages, back doors, and your neighbors' yards.

4. On Foot

Observe on foot as you walk or jog through your neighborhood. Memorize the check lists of Suspicious Activities and Sounds. Be alert to anything unusual happening in your neighborhood. Know your neighbors and your neighborhood. Practice what you have memorized by mentally reviewing what you know as you pass each neighbor's house.

5. Car or Bicycle

Observe by car or bicycle. This method of observation takes you further from your home and you must rely on your knowledge of Suspicious Activities and Sounds. Practice what is needed to report a Suspect Vehicle or Person. Practice license number memorization. Be alert and be prepared to call your police or sheriff if you recognize anything suspicious.

6. Be Prepared

Prepare yourself by having binoculars, including night vision binoculars. These are especially useful in rural and low-lit areas. A cellular phone will be useful in some areas, a CB or other radio (FRS/GMRS/Amateur) in others. If you are patrolling, which many Neighborhood Watch groups do, these are especially important.

7. At Night

When observing at night, don't look directly at what you are observing. If you look to the side, or above or below what you are observing, your vision will be clearer than if you looked directly at the subject. Also, prepare yourself by having a small, powerful flashlight, if you need to use it without arousing suspicion. Mag-Lite is an especially good brand.

8. Trust Your Judgment

Recognize and understand what you are observing. Practice observation techniques. Put them together with your ability to evaluate, deduct, organize your thinking, and make judgments. Recognize when to call for help. When your judgment (instinct) tells you something wrong is happening or is about to happen, CALL IMMEDIATELY – DON'T HESTITATE.

Suspect Something?
Call immediately!
Don't Hesitate

9. Notes

The written word, with dates, times, and properly written notes, is crucial to your reporting and following up on the criminal activities of any suspects. First, your memory is clearer when you immediately write down, what you see, logging the time of your notes. If you remember something else later, note it also, with the time. Record the suspect's description and activity, any license plate number of a vehicle, anything you might be called upon to report. Always keep a notebook and pen or pencil with you or use the Neighborhood Watch Incident Report form to record your observations.

10. Practice

Practice. Practice. Practice. Like any technique, practice makes perfect. Use your head to assimilate all you are exposed to and evaluate what you see and hear. No athlete, no pilot, no bookkeeper, not anyone, can perform up to their utmost without practice. You will learn a great deal in your Neighborhood Watch training. Practice what you learn.

RECOGNIZING SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES

What is suspicious and when do you call the police?

Suspicious activity is anything that looks like it could be connected with criminal behavior – someone casing a neighborhood, forcing open a door, grabbing a child, screaming or pounding coming from a nearby residence or apartment, or strong chemical odors

coming from an inappropriate building are but a handful of examples. If the activity is — or appears to be — threatening to property or people, immediately report the suspicious activity by calling 911. Time is critical in apprehending criminals. It is better to be overly suspicious than to let a criminal get away.

Following is a list of suspicious activities and the criminal activity that might be happening:

PEOPLE

A person, persons, groups of young people, adult(s), or gang(s):

- Gathering (loitering) for an extended or unusual period of time.
  Possible burglary, arson, or drug dealing.
- Behaving strangely.
  Possibly on drugs or preparing to do some illegal activity.
- With any sort of weapon.
  Possibly planning any number of crimes. But remember that in West Virginia it is perfectly legal for an adult to wear a sidearm, either openly or concealed.
- Carrying, concealing, or transporting anything unusual.
  Possibly burglar carrying stolen property.
- Looking into cars.
  Possibly casing cars for theft of car or its contents.
- Wearing clothing, bandannas, caps, or other attire that could spell trouble.
  Possible gang activity.
- Selling or conducting business on a street corner, park, or other place where business is not licensed.
  Possibly selling drugs or stolen property.
- Running, especially if carrying something of value.
  Possible suspect fleeing scene of crime.
- Running, especially at night, for no apparent reason.
  Possible suspect fleeing scene of crime.
- Creating any type of disturbance.
  Disturbing the Peace or covering up noise of some other activity.
- Going door to door, especially if someone goes to the rear of the residence.
  Possibly casing the neighborhood.
- Loitering around schools, parks, or on your street.
  Possible burglar, sex offense, drugs, or arson.
- Creating much foot traffic to and from a particular place, short visits.
  Possible drugs, vice, or "fencing" (selling/ buying stolen property) operation.
- Screaming for help.
  Possible rape, medical emergency, robbery, assault, or fire.
- Offering items for sale at extremely low prices.
  Possibly trying to sell stolen property.

- An older man with young females or teenagers in an unusual place or for an unusual period of time.
  Possible sex crimes of seeking or pimping (soliciting customers) for the youngsters.

The list is endless. Anyone doing anything that looks suspicious should be reported. *Trust your instincts. Call immediately! Don't Hesitate*

VEHICLES

- An occupied vehicle parked for a long period of time.
  Possibly casing the neighborhood.
- A vehicle driving around your neighborhood repeatedly, short visits.
  Possibly casing the neighborhood, operating as a point for drug dealing, a sexual deviate, or child molester waiting for their target, being a get-away car.
- Vehicle being loaded with valuables if parked by closed business or unoccupied house.
  Possible burglary in progress.
- A parked car with the engine running.
  Possible get-away car for burglary.
- Departing from a location at night with its lights off.
  Possible burglar, assault violation, or robber.
- Driving in a reckless manner or committing other serious traffic violations; problems driving their vehicle, especially if it is an expensive model.
  Possible stolen vehicle.
- The vehicle is in unusually bad condition, with signs of a recent accident, broken windows, or bullet holes in the car.
  P*ossibly involved in drive-by shooting or a hit and run accident.*
- Business is being conducted out of the vehicle.
  Possibly selling stolen items or drugs.
- An over-loaded vehicle that is heavily weighed down, parked, or traveling in your neighborhood.
  Possible burglar.
- Persons detaching mechanical parts or accessories from vehicle.
  Possible theft or vandalism in progress.
- Abandoned vehicle parked on block.
  Possible stolen vehicle.
- Someone being forced into a vehicle.
  Possible kidnapping, assault, or attempted rape.
- Odd property seen in vehicles, such as TVs, stereos, weapons.
  Possible stolen property.
- Locked vehicle that someone is trying to forcibly enter.
  Possible theft of car or contents in progress.
- Older children or adults, who are not from the neighborhood, bicycling randomly or repeatedly without a purposeful destination.
  Possible theft from homes and/or garages.

SUSPICIOUS SOUNDS

Using your ears to detect suspicious activities is very helpful in combating crime. Sounds may only last a few seconds and may go undetected. Here are some sounds which require close attention, and reporting:

Screams for Help

Always assume the scream is real and someone desperately needs help. Quickly try to determine the location, source, and nature of the scream and **immediately** call 911. Heroes can be wounded or killed. Remember that apprehension is the job of your police.

Continuous Screaming

This type of screaming probably is a result or someone being beaten, hurt, or mistreated. Especially listen for victim's cries of "Oh's" and "Ow's". Quickly try to determine the location, source, and nature of the scream and immediately call 911.

Screaming and Cursing

This type of screaming is probably a domestic violence incident between husband and wife, parent and child, two people who are intent on hurting each other but not in a life-threatening way. Determine the location, source, and nature of the scream and immediately call 911.

Gun Shot Sounds

Immediately call 911. Provide as much information as to the number of shots and their source (location). Just remember that simple fireworks are common on certain holidays.

Alarms Activated

Fire, home-burglary, business, and car alarms must always be considered as real. Determine the location, source, and nature of the alarm and call 911.

Breaking Glass

If you hear the sound of breaking glass, **immediately** call 911. This is the most common method of forced entry into a home, apartment, or automobile.

Loud Music

Loud music is usually an annoyance, and you can report it as any other nuisance. However, it is often used to cover up other criminal activities. If you hear loud music covering the cry of a screaming person, **immediately** call 911.

Forcing, Prying, or Pounding Sounds

If something is being forced, pried, or pounded you should determine the location, source, and nature of the sounds and if your suspicion is aroused, **immediately** call 911.

Dogs Barking

Continuous barking of a dog in an unusual manner is cause for alarm. Determine the location of the dog and call 911.

REPORTING PROCEDURE

Remember that the more witnesses there are to a crime, the better the likelihood that the criminal will be convicted in court. Additionally, each witness sees the event from a different perspective, and each will observe and remember different details of the event.

If you observe a *life-threatening* event, or anything that poses an imminent serious threat to property, immediately call 911 and *then* call your Watch Captain or Co-Captain and/or other Watch members. If the event does not appear to be life-threatening, call your Captain, Co-Captain, or other Watch members and together decide whether to call 911. Remember that while what you are observing may be a crime, it may also be only normal non-criminal activity.

The dispatchers at Wood County Central Communications receive hundreds of calls a day. Most of these calls are actual emergencies, but some are not. Some people who call 911 do not provide the dispatchers with sufficient information for them to know how to efficiently dispatch the needed help. Naturally, the more credible the caller, the more reliable the dispatcher will consider the call. When you need to call 911, be sure to identify yourself to the dispatcher as a member of Neighborhood Watch and be sure to be able to provide the dispatcher with a*ll* the information he or she will need to provide to the responders. *Stay on the line with the dispatcher until you are no longer needed.*

Be sure to always keep your Neighborhood Watch Roster, a pen or pencil, and a Neighborhood Watch Incident Report form or a notebook handy to record your observations.

Suspect Something?
Trust Your Instincts • Don't Hesitate • Call Immediately

COMPLETE AN INCIDENT REPORT

Whenever you call to report a crime or suspicious activity, you should complete an Incident Report form to give to the responding officer. If the officer does not want the report, give it to your Watch Captain to keep on file for possible later reference if and when the case goes to court.

INCIDENT REPORT INSTRUCTIONS

Check the box to indicate whether this was an actual crime or just suspicious activity.

Enter the date and approximate time of the incident (*not* the time you write the report).

Enter the street address or nearest intersection where the incident occurred.

Write a brief description of what happened. If you need more space, continue your description on the back.

Provide the best description you can of each party creating the problem. If there were more than three "problem parties" use an additional report form.

If you know the name of the problem party, write it in; if you don't know their name but know where they live, write in their address. Check whether the person was male or female. Try to estimate the person's age, height, and weight. If you don't think you can come

close to a guess, use descriptions like short, medium, tall, very tall; skinny, thin, medium build, large, fat/obese.

If you can see the person's hair, what color was it? Did the person have any facial hair: moustache, goatee, full beard?

Do your best to describe the person's race/ethnicity. Note any marks, scars, tattoos, or other distinguishing marks or characteristics?

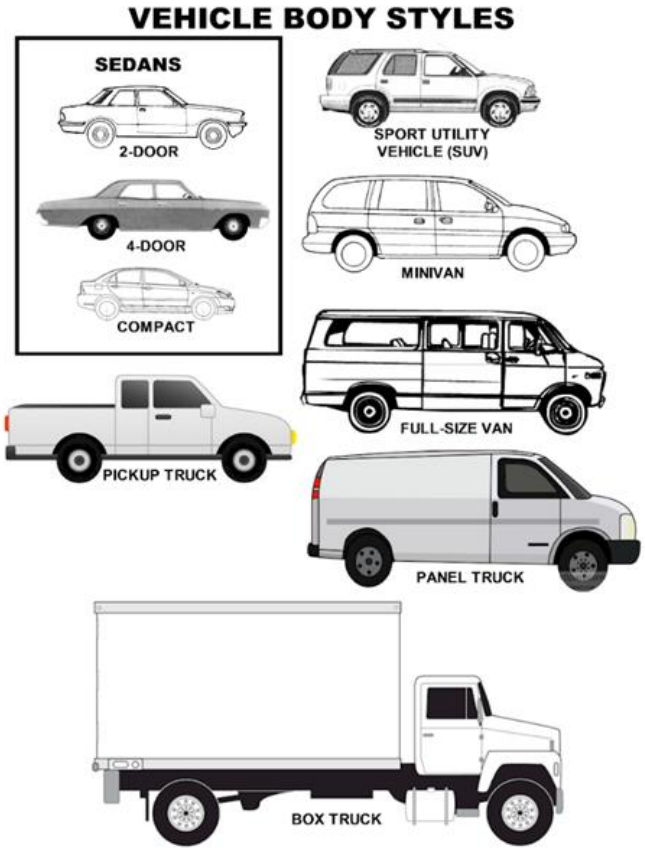
If you heard the person speak, did you notice any kind of accent? Speech impediment? Did the person speak loudly or softly; fast or slowly? Did he/she seem excited, angry, or frightened?

Describe the person's clothing. What color was it? Tee shirt or button-up? If a tee shirt or sweatshirt, was there a picture, logo, or writing on it? Long or short sleeves/pant legs? Light jacket, vest, sweatshirt, hoodie, heavy coat? Leather shoes, tennis shoes, work boots? What color were they? Baseball cap, cowboy hat, toboggan? What color? Any logo or words?

If the person had a weapon, what kind was it? The following pictures illustrate the most common type of firearm you are likely to encounter. Please note that "A.R." does *not* stand for "Assault Rifle." It actually stands for "ArmaLite Rifle" and refers to the first company to manufacture this popular style of sporting rifle in the 1950s. In reality, " assault rifles" are fully automatic (imagine a machine gun), and automatic firearms have been heavily restricted to civilians since 1934.

For the vehicle description, very few people will be able to identify the year, make, and model. If you don't know the year, just indicate if it's new, older, or really old. If you can read the make (Chevrolet, Ford, Dodge, etc.) or model (Astro, Blazer, Impala, Yukon, etc.) of the vehicle, provide that.

This picture illustrates the most common vehicle body styles for comparison.



Try to get the license plate number and the state of issue. If you cannot determine the state, note the color of the license plate, border, and background.

Make a note of any particular identifying dents, scratches, damage (like broken window or taillight), or unusual features of the vehicle. If there are bumper stickers or signs on the vehicle, make a note of what they say.

Note the direction of departure of the problem parties. If you know north, south, east, or west, use that. If you are not sure, indicate toward or away from a landmark. For example: south on Market Street, towards downtown, towards the high school, away from the park.

Obtain the names and addresses of any additional witnesses who are *not* Neighborhood Watch members. Each Watch member who observes the incident should create a separate, complete report.

Use the back of the report form to document any additional details or narrative that needs to be added to complete the report.

Enter your contact information on the bottom of the report. Give your completed report to your Watch Captain, who will make copies: the original goes to our files, one copy goes to the Police Department, and one copy will be returned to you for your personal records.