Parkersburg / Wood County Neighborhood Watch Co-op

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION TO THE SOPS

As the tired old saying goes, there are tons of moving parts in any business or organization of any size. Often, the difference between a productive, successful organization and a not-so-successful one is whether these myriad "parts" are moving in concert with one another. This can be the difference between a finely-tuned machine and one that regularly breaks down—and eventually falls apart.

For our organization to run like such a finely-tuned machine (and to avoid falling apart at the seams), our team members need to be always on the same page—both literally and figuratively.

Defining our organization's practices and standards is an important step in managing the organization effectively. Standard operating procedures give everyone in our organization the information they need to support our mission, which is primarily to serve as the eyes and ears of law enforcement within our individual neighborhoods. While there's no need to micromanage every task, it can be extremely helpful to set guidelines for how our members should handle specific issues. Organizations with clearly defined guidelines can work more efficiently and effectively while minimizing indecision.

For Neighborhood Watch this becomes of critical importance, as our primary function is effective communication: communication within and among our individual Watch Groups, communication with emergency service dispatchers, communication with law enforcement and other first responders, and perhaps even communication as a key witness in a court of law.

This is where a standard operating procedure or SOP comes into play.

WHAT IS AN SOP?

A standard operating procedure (SOP) is a document that provides clear-cut directions and instructions as to how teams and members within an organization go about completing certain processes. SOPs are important because they allows our organization to systematize our processes, always keep all team on the same page, and move forward in a singular, cohesive manner to produce effective results.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the importance of SOPs is to consider the negative impact of not having them. Basically, it leaves too much up to chance: There's no guarantee that best practices will be always followed, that all team members will remain in alignment, or that the organization will continue to operate in a positive and effective manner.

Let's take a moment to dig a bit deeper into what SOPs can do for our organization.

ENSURES ADHERENCE TO BEST PRACTICES

With SOPs in place, adherence to best practices regarding all organizational processes becomes more than merely a suggestion. The point is, an SOP provides not only a "true

north" for our team to strive toward, but also a clearly-drawn map to guide us along the way. This improves the chances of experiencing a positive outcome in a given situation, while also minimizing the chances of encountering obstacles throughout the process.

It's simple: SOPs ensure our team knows the most efficient and effective way to go about a certain task or set of tasks to produce the desired result. This means we'll be expending fewer resources to experience optimal results, regardless of the task at hand.

Ensures Consistency

As previously noted, SOPs better enable our organization to run like a finely-tuned machine. A huge part of running "like a machine" is consistency. Following SOPs ensures that our team will always know the right path to take—and will always take this path when necessary. Simply put: SOPs make both decisions and processes more automatic for our team at all times.

Enables Proper Onboarding and Training

In clearly defining standard operating procedures within our organization, we inherently make new member training easier as well as improving how our existing team members are trained with regard to best practices in certain situations.

Since one of the goals of SOPs is to leave no stone unturned in terms of contingent circumstances, we'll have a better idea of what these potential circumstances are—leaving us better prepared to train our members as to how to navigate them.

In contrast, in not having clearly-defined SOPs in place, we run the risk of leaving our team uninformed and unprepared to handle certain challenges as they come about.

Maintains Organizational Knowledge

For the sake of argument, let's say our team already knows exactly how to handle any situation that comes their way—and is always able to do so effectively and efficiently. In this case, it may seem like documenting everything our team already knows would be a waste of time, money, and other resources. After all, everyone knows what to do, so why take the time to write down everything they already know?

The problem, though, is that our team isn't going to remain intact as-is forever. Members come and go, people move away, new people move into our community. In documenting SOPs, we ensure that new team members are able to pick up right where the old ones leave off.

APPLICABILITY

These SOPs define the operation of all chartered Neighborhood Watch Groups operating within the city of Parkersburg and the unincorporated areas of Wood County. At such time as the cities of Vienna and Williamstown recognize Neighborhood Watch within their city limits, these SOPs will also apply there.