



South Riding Neighborhood Watch Patroller Training

Policies & Procedures

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Background

Neighborhood Watch is one of the most effective and least costly ways to prevent crime and reduce fear. Its roots in America can be traced back to Colonial days when night watchmen patrolled the streets. In the 1960s as society became more mobile and faster paced and more households had both the husband and wife working outside the home, neighborhoods became deserted during the daytime. Neighbors stopped being concerned about their neighbor's property and began keeping more to themselves. The unity and cohesion of the traditional neighborhood gradually deteriorated. Criminals recognized this trend, and took advantage of it. Law enforcement agencies alone were not able to keep up with the rise in burglaries.

In 1972, the National Sheriff's Association created the National Neighborhood Watch Program, a crime prevention program that incorporated citizen involvement to help reduce the increasing number of burglaries taking place, especially in rural and suburban residential areas. It was discovered that in communities in which citizens observed and reported suspicious activity, there were substantial decreases in crime and fear. Now, Neighborhood Watch signs have become commonplace in communities large and small across the country and throughout Northern Virginia.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, there was a renewed focus on Neighborhood Watch with the goal set to double the number of programs nationwide and involve them in homeland security.

The South Riding Neighborhood Watch Committee was initially launched as a working group of the Block Captain Committee in the spring of 2001. The South Riding Neighborhood Watch Program was officially recognized by the state of Virginia in October 2001. The first mobile Neighborhood Watch patrols began in March 2002. The Neighborhood Watch Committee became an independent committee in the fall of 2002. The Neighborhood Watch Committee seeks to work closely with other South Riding committees, South Riding Proprietary, and related community groups to make South Riding a safe and friendly place to live.



Program Benefits

Some neighborhoods may be more susceptible to crime than others. However, all neighborhoods should consider participating in the Neighborhood Watch Program. No matter what part of South Riding you live in, condominium, apartment, town home or single family home, the benefits are obvious:

1. **Promotion of Neighborliness** – Neighborhood Watch encourages residents to interact with each other, sharing information about work schedules, vacation plans, types of vehicles belonging to their households, etc. It also encourages neighbors to observe the property of others and occasionally attend meetings to strengthen neighborhood safety and security.
2. **Greater Awareness of Crime** – Home security and personal safety are enhanced as residents become more aware of the threat of crime. Exposure to crime prevention techniques improves a citizen's ability to remove and reduce opportunities for criminals to act.
3. **Enhanced Reporting of Suspicious Activities** – Residents are more aware of who belongs in the community and are more inclined to report suspicious persons and activities to the police. Typically, as the number of calls for suspicious activity increases, the actual number of crimes committed decreases.
4. **Warning to Criminals** – Neighborhood Watch signs alert criminals that residents are concerned about crime and will call the police when suspicious activity is observed. However, signs alone are of little deterrent value when not backed up by an active Neighborhood Watch Program.
5. **Prevention of Crime** – In addition to reductions in residential burglary, Neighborhood Watch Programs have contributed to substantial declines in thefts of property, vandalism, fraud, sexual assaults and even traffic-related offenses. Neighborhood Watch Programs have even impacted upon crimes in commercial areas of their communities as well as in churches and schools.

An active Neighborhood Watch Program in a low-crime area is added assurance it will remain safe. Crime is rarely stationary and often moves from one neighborhood to another.

Although it would seem that the prevention of crime would be the first benefit we would cite, promoting neighborliness and a sense of community is one of the major factors in the prevention of crime and the success of the Neighborhood Watch Program.



Elements of South Riding's Neighborhood Watch Program

Neighborhood Watch (NW) is a crime prevention concept that calls for citizens to watch out for their neighbor's property. Knowing this, the criminal is unwilling to risk being detected, so he either does not commit the crime or goes elsewhere. There are several elements to the South Riding Neighborhood Watch Program:

1. **Neighborhood Watch Signs** – Signs are extremely important to the program because they put the potential criminal on notice that a watch program exists and that citizens are trained to observe and report.
2. **Property Identification** – Property identification discourages thieves and makes fencing of stolen property more difficult. Residents should record serial numbers and other means of identifying all of their valuable possessions. The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) can assist in learning how to properly mark your property so it can be identified, and how to make an inventory of your valuables. Contact LCSO at 703-777-0477 or go to www.loudoun.gov.
3. **Home Security Inspections** – A LCSO Deputy will inspect the locks, doors and windows of your home with you for free. Exterior lighting and other factors affecting the protection of your home from burglary also will be reviewed. The Deputy will make recommendations for improving your home security. You can arrange for a free inspection at your convenience by calling the Crime Prevention Unit at 703-777-0477.
4. **Neighborhood Watch Decals and Magnets** – The Neighborhood Watch Committee offers decals to residents to place near their front doors to remind visitors that South Riding has a Neighborhood Watch program, and that the resident is security conscious. It also provides magnets with important emergency and non-emergency phone numbers.
5. **Neighborhood Watch Patrols** – This is the heart of the South Riding Neighborhood Watch. Residents volunteer their eyes and ears to watch the community and report anything suspicious to LCSO.
 - **Passive Observation** - This is the most common of all watch programs. It calls for all residents to observe the activities taking place in their neighborhoods in order to detect suspicious or unusual activities.
 - **Walking Patrols** – Residents who walk or jog in their neighborhoods can contribute to Neighborhood Watch by keeping an eye out for suspicious activities. Walkers and joggers can carry their cell phones to report suspicious activities to LCSO. All residents are encouraged to store the LCSO non-emergency phone number in their cell phones. Walkers and joggers are cautioned, however, to avoid personal intervention. Call 703-777-1021 to report suspicious activities, then let LCSO do its job.
 - **Mobile Patrols** – This is the primary kind of patrolling in South Riding. Patrol Volunteers undertake training and then follow the Standard Operating Procedures (see page 9) to conduct mobile patrols to aid LCSO in detecting and reporting suspicious activities.



Why to Call LCSO

You risk nothing if you call the LCSO. Consider what might happen if you fail to call and a crime is committed or a dangerous situation gets worse.

Successful efforts to combat crime require the cooperative involvement of law enforcement and citizens. The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) cannot be everywhere. For this reason, success against crime is dependent on citizen cooperation and involvement. Many crimes would not be committed if more citizens were alert to suspicious activity and notified LCSO.

LCSO indicates that South Riding does not have an inordinate amount of crime for its size and population. Most crimes in South Riding consist of traffic violations, and theft from and vandalism to homes and autos.

Neighborhood Watch depends on residents to report suspicious persons or activity. Your call could save a life, prevent an injury, or stop a criminal act. **While some suspicious activities have perfectly reasonable explanations, you risk nothing if you call. LCSO can determine whether and how to respond to any report.**

When to Call LCSO

Whenever you observe suspicious events, even though you may not be the only person observing them, call LCSO at 703-777-1021. Never think the next person will do what you should do. LCSO would rather get numerous calls about the same event or situation than none at all.

Often citizens fail to call because they are not sure if what they see is suspicious. If you are in doubt, call LCSO immediately. Valuable response time is lost if you wait to talk it over with friends or neighbors.

Don't be concerned about bothering LCSO personnel. Don't dwell on your possible embarrassment if your call should prove to be unfounded. Think instead of what could have happened had you not called. You or your loved ones or neighbors could become the victims of a criminal act.



Obvious Things to Watch for While on Patrol

Anything that seems even slightly "out of place" or is occurring at an unusual time of day or night could be criminal activity. Some of the most obvious activities to watch for and report are:

- Strangers entering a neighbor's house when it is unoccupied may be burglars.
- A scream heard anywhere might mean robbery or assault or other danger.
- A sound of breaking glass or loud explosive noises could mean an accident, burglary, or vandalism.
- Persons observed removing accessories, license plates or gas from a car should be reported.
- Persons peering into parked cars may be looking for a car to steal, or for valuables left displayed in the car.
- Offers of merchandise at ridiculously low prices could mean stolen property.
- Persons entering or leaving a business place after hours could be burglars.
- Persons loitering around schools, parks and secluded areas could be sex offenders.
- Persons loitering in the neighborhood but who do not live there could be burglars.
- Persons forcing entrance to or tampering with a residence, business, or vehicle should be reported.

Not So Obvious Things to Watch For

Not every stranger who comes into our neighborhood is a criminal. There are many perfectly legitimate door-to-door salesmen, repairmen, and servicemen moving around our neighborhoods all the time. But criminals do take advantage of this by assuming the guise of legitimate business representatives. After all, if all criminals looked like criminals, no one would have any trouble spotting them.

- A person going door-to-door may not be a legitimate solicitor. Watch for a while. If the person tries a door to see if it is locked, looks into windows, or goes into a back or side yard, it could be a burglary. Such action is even more suspicious if one person waits at the front of the house while another enters the back or side area, or if there is a vehicle following a few houses away. Call LCSO immediately at 703-777-1021. Do not wait for the people to leave.
- One or more juveniles walking through the neighborhood looking into automobiles, backyards, windows, etc. may be looking for valuables to steal.
- A person running, especially if carrying something of value, may be a thief.
- A person carrying property, if it is at an unusual hour, or in an unusual place, may be a thief.



- A person exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms may be injured, under the influence of drugs, or otherwise needing medical or psychiatric assistance.
- Human traffic to and from a residence is not suspicious unless it occurs on a daily or very regular basis, especially during late or unusual hours. It could possibly be the scene of vice activities or a fence operation.
- A person taking a shortcut through a backyard may have just broken into a neighbor's home.
- A vehicle moving slowly and without lights or following a course that appears aimless or repetitive, particularly near schools, parks and playgrounds, may be looking for places to rob or burglarize, or they could be drug dealers or sex offenders.
- Parked, occupied vehicles containing one or more persons, if it is an unusual hour, could be lookouts for a burglary in progress, even if the occupants appear to be legitimate.
- A vehicle being loaded with valuables, if parked in front of a closed business or an unattended residence, even if the vehicle is a legitimate looking commercial vehicle, could be part of a burglary. More and more professional thieves are taking the time and trouble to customize their vehicles with special signs in order to move more freely without suspicion.
- Apparent business transactions conducted from a vehicle, especially around schools or parks and if juveniles are involved, could be drug deals or other illegal activities.
- A person being forced into vehicles, especially a juvenile or female, may be a kidnapping.
- An abandoned vehicle parked on your block may be a stolen car.
- Continuous repair operations at non-business locations could mean stolen property is being stripped, repainted or otherwise altered.
- Open or broken doors or windows at a closed business or residence could mean a burglary is in progress or has already been completed.
- A beam from a flashlight in a neighbor's home, especially if they are away, could mean a burglary.
- A person wearing or carrying bloody clothing could be a suspect, or a victim of a serious crime, in need of assistance.
- A person making a quick change of vehicles may be attempting to elude the police or abandoning a stolen vehicle.

While most, if not all, of the suspicious situations described above could have innocent explanations, law enforcement departments would rather investigate a potential crime situation than be called when it is too late. Your call could save a life, prevent an injury or stop a criminal act.



Standard Operating Procedures for Patrollers

South Riding Neighborhood Watch Volunteer Patrols are residents who drive (or walk or bicycle) through the community to report incidents and problems to the LCSO and to provide a visible presence that deters criminal activity. Patrollers have no policing powers and no arrest authority. They are not police officers and are not a substitute for the police. Patrollers carry no weapons, are non-confrontational, and always coordinate activities with law enforcement.

These Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been established so Patrollers and others will clearly understand the responsibilities and objectives of the South Riding Neighborhood Watch Patrol Program. These SOPs are intended to promote the safety of patrollers and limit their potential liability exposure. Strict adherence to and observation of these SOPs are required and crucial to the safe operation of the South Riding Neighborhood Watch Patrol program.

General Guidelines

1. **No weapons are allowed** while on a Neighborhood Watch Patrol.
2. **Patrol Members are not the police**, are not law enforcement personnel, and are not a substitute for the police. Patrol members are only extra eyes and ears for the police. Patrollers observe and report illegal and suspicious activity and unsafe conditions. Patrollers must never give anyone the impression that they are law enforcement officers or personnel.
3. **Confrontation is strictly prohibited and intervention is discouraged.** Intervention to provide victim assistance once a safe environment is secured can be attempted, if patrollers agree that intervention is safe and necessary.
4. **Patrollers must observe activities from a safe distance**, determined by consensus of all members of a patrol team. If the team is approaching an unsafe or uncomfortable situation, in the opinion of any one team member, this member must signal the others, in a quick and clear fashion, to stop. The other team member(s) will respect the fellow team member's wishes.
5. **Incidents of suspected criminal behavior** and other emergency situations should be reported by calling 911.
6. **Incidents of suspicious behavior**, as opposed to suspected criminal behavior, should be reported to the LCSO non-emergency number (703-777-1021).
7. **Patrollers must be drug-free and alcohol-free.** No consumption of alcohol or other intoxicating substances is allowed before or during a patrol. Tobacco is discouraged, and may be prohibited by the owner of the patrol vehicle.
8. **Official Neighborhood Watch Patrol garments will be worn** while participating in or representing Neighborhood Watch, and must only be worn by trained Neighborhood Watch Patrollers. (This requirement does not apply in the winter months.)



9. **Patrollers must complete and sign the volunteer application and the "Hold Harmless Waiver", and attend the patroller orientation** before becoming an official Neighborhood Watch patrol member. All volunteers must be at least 18 years of age. Once you have completed the orientation and signed the waiver, you will be added to the master list of patrollers. The list will be emailed to all patrols members on a routine basis.
10. **Patrollers are responsible for safe and appropriate driving** and operation of their vehicle while on patrol. They are responsible for purchase of their own fuel, maintenance of their vehicle, and maintenance of proper personal licenses and automobile insurance.
11. **Patrollers work in teams of two or more.** You may request a specific Patrol Partner or the Patrol Coordinator will assign you a partner. At no time will members separate while on patrol, or patrol alone.
12. **Patrollers are expected to be punctual.** If you are unable to attend a scheduled patrol, please email or call your partner and the Patrol Coordinator in advance. Repeated unexcused absences from scheduled patrols will be cause for dismissal from participating in the Neighborhood Watch patrol program.
13. **The patrol team will carry necessary equipment:** "on patrol" car signs, tape, flashlight, cell phone, Activity Log, patroller guidelines, pen/pencil, map, camera, binoculars (optional). At least one team member must have a cell phone. Make sure the LCSO non-emergency number is programmed in your phone address book.
14. **Profanity is prohibited.** Avoid inflammatory and disrespectful comments. Your behavior is reflective of Neighborhood Watch and South Riding Proprietary and therefore, it is important to convey a positive attitude.
15. **Patrollers will record what took place** while on their patrol on an Activity Log, including names, date, time in and out, observations made, actions taken, and actions/follow-up required. A member of each team must be responsible for emailing the Activity Log to the Patrol Coordinator (see address at end of this document), even if there are no incidents to report.
16. **Patrol Activity Logs will only be accessible to** patrol members, South Riding Proprietary, law enforcement authorities, and the South Riding Neighborhood Watch Committee. Specific information may be released to other individuals based upon their need to know (e.g. owners of a specific property, the resident of a specific building, etc.). General information will be given to any person but this information will not single out specific buildings or individuals.
17. **Guests who wish to participate** in a Neighborhood Watch patrol must be authorized by the Neighborhood Watch Committee Chairman or the Patrol Coordinator. Guests must sign the "Hold Harmless Waiver" in advance.

When do I patrol?

1. **The patrol week starts** on Sunday and ends the following Saturday. The Patrol Coordinator will assign you and your partner a specific patrol week, taking into consideration your preferred frequency and any vacation, business trips or other



schedule conflicts you have communicated. The schedule will be emailed to all patrollers well in advance so that conflicts and constraints can be identified promptly.

2. **Two one-hour patrols** should be performed during the assigned patrol week. The patrols may occur at any time during the week, and at any time of day. The Neighborhood Watch Committee and/or Patrol Coordinator may recommend certain days and times based on current crime statistics in South Riding.
3. **Submit an Activity Log** for each patrol by sending an email to the Patrol Coordinator, even if nothing noteworthy occurred during the patrol.
4. **Please email the Patrol Coordinator** if you are unable to do your patrols during your scheduled week. Schedule changes can be easily done in advance.

How do I patrol?

1. **Put on your Neighborhood Watch apparel;** pick up and/or meet your partner.
2. **Check to make sure you have the proper equipment.** See recommended list of equipment shown above.
3. **Secure two laminated “on patrol” signs to your vehicle.** It is preferred that they be taped to the interior rear windows facing outwards. If you are walking or bicycling, wear your Neighborhood Watch shirt if feasible.
4. **Record on the Activity Log** your start time and patrol team members.
5. **Patrol with your vehicle windows down** (weather permitting) in order to see and hear better.
6. **Keep your radio turned off.**
7. **Patrol the South Riding community.** Every street in South Riding cannot be patrolled every time. Vary your route through the community so as not to be predictable. The Neighborhood Watch Committee and/or Patrol Coordinator may recommend certain streets and locations to patrol based on current crime statistics and circumstances.
8. **Obey all traffic laws.** Drive slowly. Do not obstruct traffic unnecessarily.
9. **If you call 911 or the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office non-emergency number to report a crime, incident or suspicious event,** remain near the scene, if it is safe to do so, until the LCSO arrives.
10. **Email a report of your patrol** to the Patrol Coordinator, even if nothing unusual occurred on your patrol.

What Do I Include in the Activity Log?

Since the Activity Logs may be used by law enforcement, the logs should include factual information only. Typically, law enforcement officer’s use their Patrol logs in court, and the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office (LCSO) may require South Riding Neighborhood Watch to provide our Activity Logs to them for a court case. Therefore law enforcement officials will view anything written in the log. Please do not provide funny pictures, jokes, gossip, or personal judgment. (Just the facts about your patrol).



Information concerning suspicious activities: What happened? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Was anyone hurt?

Description of persons: When describing suspects, notice age, race, sex, hair color, height and weight, and clothing. Compare your own weight and height with that of the suspects. Pick out some unique characteristics (scars, nose, tattoos, body piercings, jewelry, etc.) that will help you identify the suspect in the future if need be.

Description of vehicles: License number, make, model, color, any noticeable damage and direction of travel.

Other Information: The Activity Log can also include reports of lost or damaged street signs, broken street lights, construction site problems, open garage doors, etc. Patrollers are encouraged to use common sense to report facts and situations that can lead to improvement of the South Riding community.

Insurance

Neighborhood Watch is part of the South Riding Proprietary and as such is currently an insured activity. Participants in the program fall under the proprietary's liability insurance protections whenever acting reasonably within the scope of their authority. Please note that the coverage afforded does not provide coverage for persons acting intentionally inappropriately, in a criminal manner, or outside of the scope of their authority. Participants should at all times take all necessary steps to limit their risks, follow the SOPs set forth above, and not take any unnecessary risks. Adhering to the Policies and Procedures set forth in this document will assist the Proprietary in maintaining insurance for Association activities like Neighborhood Watch. By agreeing to and executing the "Hold Harmless Waiver," you are acknowledging your responsibility to protect the Proprietary by following the Policies and Procedures in this Training Guide.

LCSO and Neighborhood Watch Committee Contact Information

The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office web site can be found at www.loudoun.gov. The LCSO non-emergency telephone number is 703-777-1021.

The South Riding Neighborhood Watch Committee chair and board liaison can always be reached by email at: neighborhoodwatch@southeriding.net. Current information about activities and membership of the committee can be found at www.southeriding.net.