THE CPD BLOCKWATCH HANDBOOK

Introduction

The Blockwatch Handbook was created to provide a written guide for citizens and officers to refer to for the operation of an official Blockwatch in the City of Columbus.

Only Blockwatches that have gone through the processes described herein will be recognized as official and eligible for community grants, project assistance, collaborative efforts and information sharing with the City of Columbus and the Columbus Division of Police.

This handbook cannot provide all the answers but it can help the community and the police work toward a common goal.

The success of a Blockwatch is directly related to the ongoing participation and support from each member of the watch.

This information has been gathered from officers, civilians, and the Ohio Crime Prevention Association.

What is a Blockwatch?

Each day crime and the fear of crime threaten communities. Residents change their plans and lifestyles based on the fear of going out after dark. Parents and children are afraid to use local parks where criminals meet and businesses refuse to put shops in areas they believe are unsafe. It often seems as if nothing can be done to make neighborhoods safer places in which to live and work.

The Blockwatch can help solve these problems.
Blockwatches are more than looking out for suspicious activity in neighborhoods.

Today, community policing allows the police and residents to work together to solve issues involving crime and social concerns in their community. Blockwatches are one of the original foundations of community policing and are referred to as the <u>eyes and ears of law enforcement</u>. Members look out for neighbors and their property and report suspicious activities to the police.

Through community mobilization, neighbors, businesses, co-workers and students form an active partnership in the community. Blockwatches allow

individuals the opportunity to discover common interests and goals that they share with their neighbors.

The residents work to prevent the possibility of crime in their area and develop a sense of community spirit that encourages more activism.

Can I Begin a Blockwatch?

Q.	Does a Blockwatch already exist in my neighborhood?
A.	To find out, contact the Columbus Division of Police at 645-4610.

Q.	To start a Blockwatch, do problems have to exist in my neighborhood?
A.	No; a Blockwatch can be formed to *prevent* problems.

Q.	Can local associations help form a more effective Blockwatch in my area?
A.	Yes; local associations, churches and synagogues, civic organizations and youth/senior citizen groups are great resources for support as you begin a Blockwatch.
Use these groups for expertise and guidance and, in return, offer them ideas and any resources that will assist them in their community efforts.

Organizing a Blockwatch

Once you've contacted the Columbus Division of Police for information, a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) assigned to your neighborhood will help you make plans for your first meeting.

Use the following suggestions to get residents interested in attending meetings and to transform your group into a successful Blockwatch.

I.	Neighbors can be invited by telephone or going door-to-door with flyers at least ten days in advance. Flyer information should include the location, date, time and purpose of the meeting.

II.	If you distribute flyers, go with another neighbor and try to speak with residents to encourage them to come to the meeting. Ask them if they'd like a phone call, email, or text message as a reminder before the meeting and, if so, get their number/email before you leave.

III.   Invite any individuals or groups in the area who would have an interest in attending. Schools and businesses, churches, civic groups and local government leaders all have an investment in the health of the community and will often become active partners with Blockwatches that are working to improve their neighborhoods.

IV.   Survey neighbors when you invite them to the first meeting to get a sense of the concerns that they have for their area. Ask them a few brief questions then make those a part of the agenda for the meeting.

V.   Draft a simple agenda and give residents a copy at the meeting. An agenda will help members focus on the issues they first raised in response to the survey. If an issue is raised that is not on the agenda, write it down for discussion at your next meeting.

VI.   Check the meeting room to make sure that you have what you'll need for speakers and presentations. If audio-visual equipment will be used, know how it operates before the meeting begins. Have a flip chart or blackboard, paper, markers and pens available so members can take notes.

VII.   Keep the meeting brief and focused. 60 to 90 minutes is a good length of time for Blockwatch meetings. People will also be more likely to participate if the meeting starts and ends on time.

VIII.   Distribute duties so one person is not doing all the work. Divide bigger jobs into smaller tasks so that the members do not get burned out.

IX.   Write down the names of those attending along with home and email addresses and day and evening telephone numbers. This list will help members stay in contact and can be used to create a phone/email tree.

X.   Schedule meetings once a month/every other month and hold them on the same day/time.

The Blockwatch Meeting

I.   <u>Welcome and Sign In:</u>
Welcome everyone and let them know how long the meeting will last. Use a sign-in sheet to keep track of who is present at the meeting. Read aloud the agenda and items to be covered and tell residents there will be time after the meeting to ask questions.

II.   <u>Introductions:</u>
Let residents introduce themselves by giving their names and addresses.

III.   <u>Discussion of Neighborhood Issues:</u>
Allow residents time to raise specific neighborhood concerns. At the first few meetings, residents might express anger and frustration over neighborhood problems and criticize law enforcement for not doing more to address their problems. As time goes on though, residents will use this time to focus on specific issues and ways to address them.

IV.   <u>Crime Prevention Presentation:</u>
During the first four meetings, the CLO will provide information on crime prevention topics and ways to maintain an active Blockwatch. The following meetings can have guest speakers.

V.   <u>Selection of a Blockwatch Coordinator:</u>
The basic structure of a Blockwatch involves a coordinator, captains, and members.

A coordinator and captain may volunteer for those positions or be elected by the members and serve for a 2-year term (unless elected in an even year where the term shall be the remainder of that year, plus two until June of the odd-numbered year)

> **Blockwatch Coordinators and any Captains/Board Members *shall* be reelected/reaffirmed in their positions during June of odd-numbered calendar years.**

>> This allows for additional members of the community to serve in leadership positions or for the community to continue on with the same personnel if they so choose to.

Some identified qualities of a good Blockwatch Coordinator:

- **Accessible to the community and CPD**

- **Operates with Integrity, Honesty, Trustworthiness, and in the best interest of the community, not themselves**
- **Well-organized**
- **Receptive to input from the community and CPD**
- **Always reaching out to the surrounding community, businesses, area and encouraging participation and input**
- **Communicates and participates with their communities via emails, newsletters, and meetings**
- **Communicates with CPD CLOs on regular basis**
- **Participates in City programs like Litter Clean-up, Neighborhood Pride, Gardening/Park Projects, etc.**
- **Seeks ways to make their neighborhoods safe while also addressing the quality of life issues**
- **Holds votes within the groups to have a general collective community agreement on any changes**

Collaboration Criteria for Blockwatch Coordinator:

The following criteria *shall* be met for the CPD Community Liaison Officers to be able to collaborate with the Blockwatch Coordinator.

- **No pending charges (except Minor Misdemeanor traffic charges) or any warrants.**
- **No non-violent felony convictions or any type of theft conviction within the past 5 years.**
- **No conviction for *any* offense of violence in the last 10 years.**
- **Not a convicted sex offender.**
- **Community Liaison Officers may check applicants' past criminal records through the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway prior to confirming the appointment.**
    - **If already serving as a coordinator when charges or warrants are filed, the information will be forwarded to the CPD Strategic Response Bureau Chain of Command for compliance review and determination if the Blockwatch Coordinator will stay in good standing pending the court outcome or if the Coordinator will need to step down for the Blockwatch to stay in good standing.**
- **The addition of the Community Liaison Officer's email/mailing address to any and all correspondences sent out on behalf of the Blockwatch**

o **This will ensure compliance with these directives, with city rules or regulations, and allow for information sharing between the Blockwatch and CLO.**

- **Advising the CLO of upcoming meetings and ensuring the Blockwatch conducts them regularly**

VI. **Issues for Next Meeting:**
Before the meeting adjourns, plan on the issues to be discussed at the next meeting.

VII. **Date, Time, and Place for Next Meeting:**
Members usually meet once a month or, at the least, every other month. Captains and other members involved with planning, training and meeting activities usually meet more often.

VIII. **Adjourn/Refreshments:**
The time after the meeting can be as important as the meeting itself. During this time, members have the opportunity to visit and build friendships and informally brainstorm on future goals and strategies.

Roles and Responsibilities of a Blockwatch Member

The Blockwatch coordinator is the guide for the Blockwatch. It is the responsibility of the coordinator to ensure that all participants are notified of upcoming Blockwatch meetings by the use of the phone/email tree system.

** The coordinator will also contact their Community Liaison Officer to provide notice of the meeting and to see if any new or additional information needs to be passed on to members. **

I. **Role of a Blockwatch Member:**
In order to maintain the sanctity of a neighborhood and the structure of a Blockwatch, there are four objectives Blockwatch members should practice:

- **Be the <u>eyes and ears</u> of law enforcement and be able to react to activity and suspicious persons without confrontation.**
- **Teamwork - neighbors working together can solve problems.**
- **Practice personal safety and security while out in the community.**
- **Attend Blockwatch meetings on a regular basis.**

II. **Organizational Structure:**

Blockwatch Coordinator:

- **Leads meetings.**
- **Coordinates information with the police.**
- **Delegates duties among captains and members.**
- **Develops agendas and finds guest speakers for meetings.**

Blockwatch Captain:

- **Performs all the duties of a member.**
- **Assists the coordinator in performing their duties.**

Blockwatch Member:

- **Attends meetings.**
- **Works with other members on common goals.**
- **Looks after residences when neighbors are away.**
- **Supports the captain and coordinator in accomplishing goals.**

- **Reports suspicious and criminal activity to Police Radio Room (614-645-4545 or 911, as appropriate).**

III. **Phone Tree/Email Distribution List:**
At each Blockwatch meeting, an assigned person will gather the sign-in sheet and produce an updated phone tree/list. It is very important that all members of the Blockwatch (and the CLO) receive this phone tree and email communication on a regular basis from the Blockwatch coordinator.

All members are responsible for informing the Blockwatch coordinator of any information changes that occurred. A member may request that his/her name and address be removed from the Blockwatch phone tree/list at any time.

IV. **Training:**
All training issues will be decided by the Blockwatch as a whole but the coordinator will make the requests.

A Blockwatch may refer to an outside source to obtain training on any issue at any time.

V. **Problem Solving:**
The practice of solving neighborhood issues and concerns is the responsibility of all involved with the organization.

No *one* person should take it upon himself/herself to resolve all issues all the time. This is a *team concept,* let's use the entire team.

The following procedures may help in resolving issues:

- **Identify concerns**
- **Prioritize**
- **Recognize underlying causes**
- **Create a plan**
- **Act upon decisions**
- **Evaluate results**

VI. **Crime Statistics:**
The **Columbus Division of Police** now utilizes an *online database of crimes* and activity that all police personnel have access to.

This database also has a public access portal that allows for limited information to be available, free of charge, to citizens and community groups to utilize; it can also be programmed to send alerts and information to individual email addresses, as desired.

You can access RaidsOnline via the following link: http://raidsonline.com/

Once on the website, be sure to utilize the menus on the left-hand side of your screen to input a *specific address, intersection, city, zip code, or area to search and utilize the other choices to expand or contract your search*.

This website allows for you to choose *all crimes* or *only certain crimes*, specific dates or ranges of dates, locations, and much more. You are also able to set-up email alerts that can be sent to you as data is entered.

If you desire additional information on a specific crime listed, you are able to copy or print information off **RaidsOnline** and then go to the **Columbus Division of Police** website itself (**www.columbuspolice.org**) to obtain additional public information from *Offense Reports* page: **www.columbuspolice.org/Reports/PubDefault.aspx**

VII. **Blockwatch Signs:**
The Blockwatch signs are the property of the City of Columbus, Division of Traffic Engineering.

The city and the community members determine the placement of signs, but the city has the final authority and may have to move locations to comply with other codes.

Several months may be required to place the signs due to city regulations.

The Role of Law Enforcement

With training and guidance from a Columbus Police Officer, a Blockwatch can be transformed from a group of isolated individuals into a united and committed team working on safety concerns in their neighborhood and community. The CLO assigned to the neighborhood plays an essential role in the creation and development of effective Blockwatches. They are trained to serve as the vital communication link between the law enforcement agency and the citizens. Officers help residents problem-solve to prevent crime and resolve community issues.

I.   **Training:**
An important role of the CLO is to help educate and train residents in crime prevention and offer training on topics of interest to members and their specific neighborhood.

- **Blockwatch Procedures**
- **Personal Safety**
- **Residential Safety**
- **Problem Solving**
- **RaidsOnline use**
- **Other classes available (examples can be found online at www.columbuspolice.org)**

II. **Support:**
The officers contribute constructive support and motivate members as they form their watch. Later, they work with members by answering questions and offering information on ways to mobilize with other community groups to achieve lasting results. Members utilize the support of the officer beyond the initial meetings as they tackle group goals.

III. **Guidance:**
The officers guide members as they set up their watches and during meetings they help members focus discussions on specific ways to solve neighborhood problems and use each member's skills and talents to achieve set goals.

IV. **Leadership:**
The police officer acts as an advisor contributing both technical expertise and their experiences in the field to encourage active participation from members. The challenge is to help members gain enough momentum so that they can eventually function on their own as a team with limited updates and information simply passed on.