

NWACA

Neighborhood Watch

# Block Captain Guidebook

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**NWACA Crime and Safety Committee**

[www.nwaca.org](http://www.nwaca.org)  
[info@nwaca.org](mailto:info@nwaca.org)

## NWACA Neighborhood Watch Approach

### Key Players

- NWACA Crime and Safety Committee
- Neighborhood Watch Block Captains – each captain watches over a block of homes (block = street, portion of a street, more than one street, as appropriate)
- Neighbors – residents on a street within a Neighborhood Watch block
- Austin Police Department (APD) – Region 1, Baker sector covers NWACA

### General Approach

- Neighbors notify NWACA of an interest in setting up a Neighborhood Watch
  - email to [info@nwaca.org](mailto:info@nwaca.org) or
  - complete the Neighborhood Watch request form online at [www.nwaca.org](http://www.nwaca.org)
- NWACA Crime and Safety Committee
  - Solicits block captains and other interested leaders
  - Trains Block Captains, providing them a set of materials for their role
  - Assists with training for a block gathering of neighbors
  - Provides a Neighborhood Watch sign for each block which has completed its training, as well as assistance with putting up the sign
  - Establishes a collection of references and resources on the NWACA web site
  - Attends APD Community Forums for NWACA.
  - Communicates regularly with Block Captains.
- Block Captain
  - Attends training for block captains
  - Creates a list of their block neighbors
  - Calls a meeting of the neighbors, at which NWACA Crime and Safety Committee provides training materials for each neighbor
  - Continuously monitors the block and passes information to neighbors, police, other block captains, Crime and Safety Committee, and surrounding neighborhoods as appropriate
  - Attends APD Community Forums for NWACA, when held.
- Each neighbor (perhaps with help of the Block Captain)
  - Conducts a safety check of their home, using the provided checklist
  - Does their Five – getting to know the 5 nearby neighbors
  - Continuously monitors the block and reports issues to the block captain and others.

## Neighborhood Watch Block Captain FAQ's

### Q. What is a block captain?

**A.** A block captain is the eyes and ears for a block of houses, and looks for anything out of the ordinary that might need attention. They carry out the Neighborhood Watch Program on a given street. They are not vigilantes; they notify the police when necessary and do not try to act as police themselves.

### Q. What is a block?

**A.** A block can be all the houses along one or more streets, or it may be a portion of the houses on a given street.

### Q. What are the duties of a block captain?

**A.** A block captain:

- creates a contact list for their block
- holds a block meeting to explain the program to their neighbors
- tracks incidents around the block and updates residents of the block about any pertinent issues such as a break-in
- keeps their ears and eyes open and calls 311 to report issues detected
- calls 911 if an officer is needed
- coordinates annual National Night Out activities on their street if they choose to do so

### Q. What are the benefits of the Neighborhood Watch program and having a block captain on our street?

**A.** It fosters communication and a close-knit community on your block. The time commitment is very small and the outcome can be extremely helpful. Block captains have gotten Neighborhood Watch signs installed, alerted residents of everything from break-ins on their street to happy events going on. The idea is to watch out for each other and keep communication open, which makes for a better community all around.

### Q. How do you become a block captain?

**A.** You can sign up on the NWACA web site, [www.nwaca.org](http://www.nwaca.org), and a Neighborhood Watch leader will then set up a time to do the 30-minute training at your convenience. Use the link under the Get Involved tab of the home page to get to the sign-up form.

## Neighborhood Watch Block Captain Highlights

### What Is Neighborhood Watch?

- Neighborhood Watch is a non-confrontational crime prevention program that enlists the active participation of neighborhood residents in cooperation with law enforcement to reduce crime in their community.
- It is about keeping an eye on each other, opening communication on your block, and hardening the target for criminals.
- It is neighbors getting to know each other and taking the time to care about each other, a program of mutual assistance and security.
- It is neighbors trained to recognize and report suspicious activity.
- The Neighborhood Watch program employs the best crime fighting tool ever invented - a watchful neighbor.
- Residents are the people who really know their neighborhood and may recognize when someone or something is suspect.
- APD officers cannot be on every block - Neighborhood Watch members can be.
- Neighborhood Watch participants serve as eyes and ears only. They observe and report suspicious activity. They do not act as law enforcement.
- APD determines their patrol areas based on frequency of calls in the area. Therefore, it is important to report crimes to encourage equitable patrol coverage in the future.

### Steps to being a Neighborhood Watch Block Captain

- Decide what houses you will cover.
- Pick a date for an introductory Neighborhood Watch meeting, scheduling someone from the NWACA Crime and Safety Committee to be present, invite APD District Representative
- Tailor an introductory letter using the letter on the NWACA web site, and go door to door with the letter to invite people to the meeting and get their contact info
- Share safety tips during the meeting, encourage people to share concerns, and find an alternate block captain – if needed.
- Collect everyone's contact info and create an email group and a contact list for your group that you can share with those who want to be involved. Create a map of the street if you'd like.
- Watch out for suspicious activity, call 911 when needed, and inform block members of anything pertinent. Use [www.krimelabb.com](http://www.krimelabb.com) for looking up police reports. You can also have [www.Spotcrime.com](http://www.Spotcrime.com) deliver alerts to your e-mail address. Austin monthly crime statistics are reported in <https://www.austintexas.gov/page/chiefs-monthly-reports>. “Baker Section” is the patrol area which includes NWACA
- Become a member of NWACA and join the NWACA mailing list and/or Facebook group.
- Review the materials in this Block Captain Guidebook, all of which is kept current in the Neighborhood Watch section of the NWACA web site, [www.nwaca.org](http://www.nwaca.org), under the tab for Resources at Library/Neighborhood Watch.
- Take part in National Night Out, which is the first Tuesday of October every year.
- Send any questions to [info@nwaca.org](mailto:info@nwaca.org) and we'll get back to you.

# What you need to do to help us create a safe neighborhood:

## Watch for...

- Suspicious persons or activities.
- Vehicles passing by numerous times, suspiciously parked, or appearing to be aimlessly cruising.
- Strangers in your neighborhood, especially if they are loitering with cell phones and/or backpacks
- Teenagers who are hanging out in the neighborhood while school is in session
- People with flyers or handouts. They may be casing the neighborhood looking for easy targets.
- The person “taking a short-cut” through a yard.
- Strange vehicles parked at your neighbor’s house.

If you see something suspicious, don’t assume someone else has called the police. It is your neighborhood – if you see something you feel is suspicious – **Take Action** and **do something about it**. Note the description of the suspicious person and/or vehicle and **call the City Immediately at 311**.

If you see an actual crime in progress, immediately telephone the Emergency number **911** and report this incident to the police. Do not confront any suspicious persons yourself or attempt an arrest, as your safety could be jeopardized. **Call the Police!**

## What Else You Can Do:

Exchange work and vacation schedules with a neighbor you trust, so you can keep an eye on each others homes. Take in their trash cans, if they’ve been left out for collection on the day they leave.

Contact the Block Captain for neighborhood incidents or questions about crime and safety on your block. For general concerns, email [nwacainfo@gmail.com](mailto:nwacainfo@gmail.com) or post a note to the NWACA Facebook page.

(Sample letter for neighbors – tailor as you see fit)

Dear neighbor,

NWACA has recently started a Neighborhood Watch program, to help neighbors prevent crime throughout the entire neighborhood area. As part of this program, block captains in NWACA

- help keep an eye and ear out for suspicious activities or possible dangers in the neighborhood
- contact the police about concerns
- disseminate information to neighbors

I have volunteered to be the block captain for our block and I would like to create an e-mail list of all the people on our block, so that I can relay information to you, and we can all be better aware of happenings on our street.

Please either e-mail me with the best way to reach you, or return the bottom portion of this page to my house. This information is intended to be shared with other neighbors, so that we can all watch out for each other’s houses during the day. You are not required to share it.

In the future I will be receiving information about crimes in our neighborhood, safety tips, and other pertinent information about our neighborhood which I will pass on to you.

Thanks so much,

Your name here

your address here

Phone: phone number here

Email: e-mail address here

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Best way to reach me \_\_\_\_\_phone \_\_\_\_\_e-mail

I am home during the day: \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Prefer not to answer

I am okay with my email address being shared with the neighbors on our street. \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

I am interested in being an alternate block captain. \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

Current Concerns or anything else you want to tell me:

## Neighborhood Watch Resources

<p>NWACA Web Site Info</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.NWACA.org">www.NWACA.org</a></li> <li>• Use the Resources tab on the home page; go to Library; select Neighborhood Watch from the menu on the right side of the page</li> <li>• Resources include Block Captain and Neighbor Guidebooks, and supporting files</li> </ul>
<p>Web sites and online resources about Neighborhood Watch</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood Watch – Austin Police Department – general advice (check with neighborhood association or APD District Rep)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="http://www.austintexas.gov/faq/how-do-i-start-neighborhood-watch">http://www.austintexas.gov/faq/how-do-i-start-neighborhood-watch</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• National Night Out – Austin – description and registration information for doing a NNO event for your neighborhood; enables you to get City personnel – firemen, police, EMS, Code Compliance – as well as packets of information             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="http://austintexas.gov/nno">http://austintexas.gov/nno</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Resources online</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austin Police Department Neighborhood Watch Manual – 25 page collection of advice, including materials from several sources outside of Austin             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Police/Neighborhood_Watch_Manual_Revised_9_3_13.pdf">http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Police/Neighborhood_Watch_Manual_Revised_9_3_13.pdf</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Next Door – Private social network for a given neighborhood - intended for building community and for reporting and hearing about neighborhood issues such as crimes             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="https://nextdoor.com/">https://nextdoor.com/</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Crime Information websites</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austin monthly crime statistics are reported <a href="https://www.austintexas.gov/page/chiefs-monthly-reports">https://www.austintexas.gov/page/chiefs-monthly-reports</a>. “Baker Section” is the patrol area which includes NWACA</li> <li>• Krimelabb – viewer for data and statistics about crimes in Austin; uses APD database of crime reports             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="http://krimelabb.com/">http://krimelabb.com/</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Spotcrime – information about specific crimes, to get email alerts about crimes             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="http://spotcrime.com/tx/austin">http://spotcrime.com/tx/austin</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• APD site for alerts on crime and for reporting crime activities – Citizen Observer To sign up: <a href="https://www.citizenobserver.com/people/sign_up">https://www.citizenobserver.com/people/sign_up</a></li> </ul>
<p>Property owner information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travis Central Appraisal District database (TCAD) – information about who owns the property at a given address, history of changes of ownership, and tax details; can search by owner name, street, specific address. This can be a quick way to get the names of people who live along a street for which you’re setting up a Neighborhood Watch (though you may need some trial and error to get what you want – the system isn’t very user-friendly!)</li> <li>• <a href="https://stage.travis.prodigycad.com/property-search">https://stage.travis.prodigycad.com/property-search</a></li> </ul>