

## Secrets of successful condo neighborhood watches

**Most condominium property managers and boards look for ways to prevent crime and improve resident life. Hardly anything beats visible foot traffic for deterring bad things from happening. This blog discusses neighborhood watches.**

Working with the local police force, condo complexes can develop a combination of safety programs and crime deterrents that may effectively prevent crime from happening in the first place, or substantially reduce it if a pattern develops. Even if the police cannot dedicate more patrols to your community, they often can assist in the establishment of a neighborhood watch effort.

Neighborhood watch is just as its name states – a group of neighbors who keep their eyes open for signs of trouble and report suspicious or criminal activity to the police. The committee members don't take any direct action toward the crime themselves; rather, they report it to the police for the appropriate response. Watch participants typically receive training from the police so they know how to stay safe and how to handle situations they may encounter in their watch duties. It's important they closely follow police guidance so they exercise safe practices for themselves and those they encounter during the course of their service.

Actions that lead to injury or property damage could come back as liability claims against the condo property manager or association. Whoever sponsors or runs a neighborhood watch program should emphasize and enforce the practices taught to participants by police trainers, and refresh training on a scheduled periodic basis. Online documents are usually available, and regular meetings can be a good place to drive home law enforcement guidance on permissible patrol activities and responses.

It's also important to make sure the condominium by-laws allow creation of a neighborhood watch group and that your commercial insurance policy covers such activities. In all cases, boards should be careful about liability for the actions of the watch committee. If anything goes awry and there is injury or property damage as a result of actions within the watch group, the association and/or its board members could be drawn into a liability claim.

In some jurisdictions, neighborhood watch programs are independent citizen groups run by the police department, not by the condo association or manager. The watch group may as a courtesy provide information to the association board or property manager, but it is unaffiliated and not sponsored by the complex in any way in its capacity as a group, though its

membership is likely to be made up of residents. Before sponsoring or permitting a neighborhood watch group, be sure to check with both your legal counsel and your insurance advisor to make sure you are not creating undue liability issues and that you have proper liability insurance.

Please share your thoughts, questions, and comments.

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