

The Neighbors
of
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10 Things You
and Your
Neighbors Can
Do



- ◆ Walk around your block everyday
- ◆ Make a map of your neighborhood
- ◆ Pick up dangerous garbage
- ◆ Get acquainted with the police
- ◆ Communicate with absentee property owners
- ◆ Use of the telephone to call for assistance
- ◆ Remove graffiti
- ◆ Remove abandoned cars
- ◆ Replace broken street and park lights
- ◆ Stop inappropriate use of your neighborhood park

Staying Active

It's an unfortunate fact that when a neighborhood crime crisis goes away, so does the enthusiasm for Neighborhood Watch. Work to keep your Watch groups a vital force for community well being.

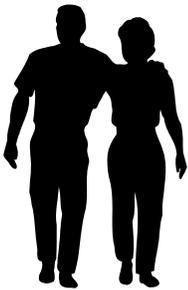
**Santa Cruz Police Department Crime
Prevention Unit**

*155 Center Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95060*

GETTING STARTED

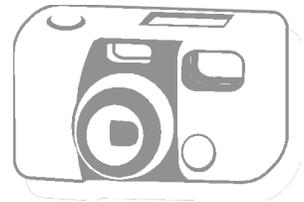
All activities described in this section are actions you can take immediately to reclaim your neighborhood. People working together have more power and influence and work longer than individuals working alone. Try to recruit other family members and neighbors to join your effort. However, one person can be successful in all the activities included in this section.

#1: WALK ROUND YOUR BLOCK EVERY DAY



- ✓ On the first day you decide to do something about your neighborhood, take a walk around the area. It is best to begin walking up one side of your street, crossing, and walking back down the other. Try walking around the block. The purpose of the walk is to:

- Check out the conditions of the neighborhood and write down the problems that you see.
- Talk to other neighbors about cleaning up the neighborhood
- Get to know your neighbors.



✓ **Study the neighborhood**

As you walk, study the neighborhood. Look at every house, car, in yards, gutters, and in the bushes. Get to know every part of your neighborhood. It is helpful to take notes about what you see. Make a list of things you believe to be dangerous or a nuisance to the neighborhood. Broken glass, trash, drug paraphernalia, abandoned cars, and damaged property are all problems that you should look for during your walk. If you find something especially unusual, take a photograph of it.

✓ **Talk with people**

Talk with people who are outside their homes. Introduce yourself and tell them you have decided to start re-claiming the neighborhood. Share with them a copy of this guidebook. As many copies as you need are available from the Crime Prevention Unit. Invite them to walk around the neighborhood with you. As people get acquainted with you, they will become friendlier and may join you on your walk.

✓ **One step at a time**

This neighborhood walk is extremely important. This is the first step in taking back your neighborhood one step at a time. Taking a walk is doing something - no matter that it is small in comparison to the damage being done by those who are tearing it down. If you don't take the first step, you will never get started.

✓ **Watching at night**

When unwanted activity occurs, especially at night, you can still observe what is going on in your neighborhood and enter information into a daily log. If, looking out your windows at night, you witness drug dealing, gang activity, prostitution, speeding cars, excessive foot traffic or loitering, write these down in your daily log. This information will be helpful for other activities described later in this guidebook. Contact Dispatch: **831 471-1131 or 911.**

✓ **Accomplishing the first two important tasks**

The first time you walk your neighborhood you will accomplish the first task in taking back your neighborhood and you will have started the process of cleaning up the neighborhood. The day when someone else joins you on your walk you will have accomplished a second important task in taking back your neighborhood. You will have **recruited** someone else to help.

#2: MAKE A MAP OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



□ **What is your neighborhood?**

One of the most important parts of a neighborhood effort is defining boundaries. Which homes, streets, schools, and parks are you willing or able to include in your efforts? The following questions may be helpful in defining your neighborhood.

- How big an area can you and your neighbors reasonably expect to change?
- Where do the problems occur? Are those areas part of the neighborhood?
- Are there any natural barriers that define your neighborhood?
- Does your neighborhood already have a name and boundaries?

If you are uncertain about the boundaries of your neighborhood, there are ways to select them. For example, the neighborhood might include all of the houses on your court, or on your street extending to the first cross street.

□ **Set your own boundaries**

You should set your own personal boundaries in your neighborhood in order to set your own goals for changing the neighborhood. Select an area that makes sense to you and that you are willing to work on. Your neighbors may select different boundaries and, later, you can combine areas and move forward together. But for now, select an area that is important to you and start working on it.

#3: PICK UP DANGEROUS GARBAGE

□ **Daily Pickup**

Your neighborhood may contain many kinds of dangerous garbage. It is common to find used syringes, used condoms and broken bottles in the gutter, on the sidewalk or in the park. Not only is this garbage unsightly, children find these items and play with them, putting themselves at risk of serious injury. Carry a glove and trash bag with you on your walks through the neighborhood. Pick up those dangerous items you find and dispose of them in a trash can. Police Officers have sharps syringe disposal containers in their patrol cars. **Contact police dispatch: 831 471-1131 or 911**



□ **Large Objects**

Ways to remove large objects (abandoned cars, large piles of trash, etc.) are described later in this guidebook.

#4: GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE POLICE

◆ **Introduce yourself to local law enforcement officers**

It is very acceptable and very effective to speak with uniformed officers in your neighborhood. Introduce yourself, and start talking about your efforts to reclaim the neighborhood. Be friendly and honest. Officers know that good relationships with people in neighborhoods make their jobs easier and safer. They will respond positively to your friendly efforts. Any steps you take to become familiar with local officers will be beneficial in your efforts to reclaim your neighborhood. **Contact police dispatch: 831 471-1131 or 911**

◆ **Learn about local enforcement programs**

There are many law enforcement programs available in your neighborhood. **The most common services include:**

- "911" emergency assistance
- **831 471-1131** for an officer response
- Meeting with your Beat Lieutenant

Other telephone numbers for the Police Department are available in the **Government Pages** in the front of the white pages of the telephone directory under Santa Cruz City Of and Police Department.

◆ **Create a partnership with your police department**

Many of the activities described in this guidebook involve neighborhoods and law enforcement working together. You will have greater success with law enforcement if you develop working relationships with them. Law enforcement cannot solve all your problems, however can be a very powerful partner.

Don't expect law enforcement to do every thing for you, just the parts that you cannot accomplish yourselves. They are in your neighborhood to protect the public, to preserve the peace and to intervene in an emergency. Any other task that does not endanger the neighborhood or breach the peace is your responsibility. Let law enforcement know you are serious and determined to cleanup your neighborhood. Support their efforts and they will support yours.

A working partnership with law enforcement is not just doing what they say. You and your neighbors have the greatest stake in reclaiming your neighborhood and you have the right to help decide what law enforcement will do there. However, until you have communicated with law enforcement you will not have any input into what they do.

Contact police dispatch: **831 471-1131 or 911**

#5: COMMUNICATE WITH ABSENTEE PROPERTY OWNERS AND LANDLORDS

◆ **Your rights as a neighbor**

As a resident of your neighborhood, you have the right to peace and security. Your family has the right to come and go from your property without the threat of violence. If you neighbor is disturbing you, contact the neighbor about the problem or contact the owner of the property. If that fails, you can call the police and ask them to intervene to stop the problem.

◆ **Absentee owners**

Some people who own property in your neighborhood may not live there. Investors often buy homes and rent them out. These "absentee" property owners may not know what is going on at their property. A very important task one person can accomplish is to locate neighborhood property owners, contact them and tell them what is going on in the neighborhood and on their property.

◆ **Supportive owners**

Most absentee owners care about their investments in your neighborhood. As the quality of life improves in the neighborhood, the value of their property also will increase. Conversely, the value of property drops if it is being used for illegal activity. If you tell absentee owners about drug problems or illegal activity on

their property, they may act immediately to end the problem. Landlords who monitor what happens on their property can be a powerful force in a neighborhood clean-up campaign.

◆ **Non-supportive owners**

Unfortunately, some property owners do not intervene to protect their property. Property owners fail to supervise their tenants for a variety of reasons:

- The owner may live out of town and not aware of the problem
- The property management company may not bother to monitor behavior
- The property may be owned by corporations, trusts, or legal entities that move around on paper without ever knowing where or what the property is
- The owner may be physically or financially unable to care for the property
- The owner may know what is going on but be too fearful to intervene

A non-supportive absentee owner may be a problem, but you can motivate non-supportive owners to correct the problems on their property.

◆ **How to find an absentee property owner**

You can find out who owns the problem property by telephoning the county assessor's office and asking them. Property ownership is public information and you have the right to know who owns what property. The Santa Cruz County assessor's office is located on the first floor of the County Government Center, which is located at **701 Ocean Street**.

◆ **Ask the owner to help**

Your first contact with the owner should be polite and you should clearly state your concerns. Tell the owner what is going on and ask them to help stop the problem. Although you may be angry with the owner, remember that she or he has the power to solve the problem. Approach the owner as a friend, and they may help you.

◆ **How to communicate with an absentee property owner**

Once you get the name and address of the property owner, try to telephone them if you can get the phone number from the directory. If you cannot telephone them, send them a letter. Whether you contact them by telephone or write them, the purpose is the same: tell them what is going on at their property, and ask them to correct the problem. When you telephone the absentee landlord, make a written record of the date, time and context of the conversation. If you send the landlord a letter send it by certified mail and keep a copy of what you send him/her. Later, you may need to prove that you told him/her of the problems the neighborhood is having with his tenant.

◆ **“Motivating” an absentee owner to intervene**

If the owner is not responsive to your request, you have considerable power to force them to comply. You can turn to several sources to help motivate the owner to correct the problem. These include:

- Local Law Enforcement
- City Council Members
- District Attorney
- Health Department
- Planning Department
 - Code Enforcement
- Public Works Department
- Parks and Recreation Department

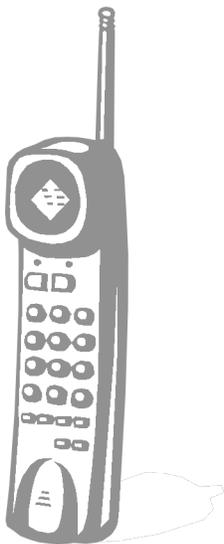
◆ **Small Claims Court**



One of the most powerful resources you have is small claims court. You can sue an unsupportive property owner for allowing behavior to occur on their property that causes you pain and suffering. In California, you can sue in small claims court for up to \$5000 in damages. If you take a landlord to small claims court, you will need to show that you told the landlord of the problems and that nothing was done to correct them. This is where a journal of the problems and documentation of correspondence with the landlord is needed. Additional pressure can be brought to bear on an uncooperative landlord if neighbors join together and file a joint suit for \$7500 each.

Additional information may be obtained through the Small Claims Court: 831 454-2220

#6: USE OF THE TELEPHONE TO CALL FOR ASSISTANCE



➤ **Your telephone – a powerful tool**

Your telephone is a powerful tool for reclaiming your neighborhood. There are many public services available to help you clean up your neighborhood. All of these services can be reached by telephone.

➤ **Create a partnership with the system**

Success in reclaiming your neighborhood will depend on the partners you bring in to help. People who work for the police, the schools, social services, and health services want to fix the problems of the community but they know they are unable to do it without your help as a partner in solving neighborhood problems. Sometimes systems

people only want neighborhood people to help the system; sometimes neighborhood people only want the system to help their neighborhood.

An effective partnership works two ways: the system needs your help to solve its problems' and you need help from the system to solve your neighborhood's problems. In order for things to get better and stay better in your neighborhood, you and the system have to enter into a truly equal partnership.

➤ **Get help from the system**

Public agencies can help you solve many problems in your neighborhood. The system can help you with a variety of tasks including:

- ❑ Removing graffiti **831 420-5303**
- ❑ Removing abandoned cars **831 420-5863**
- ❑ Replacing street and park lights **831 420-5520**
- ❑ Cleaning up or closing dangerous property **831 420-5111**

These tasks are discussed further, later. You can begin all of these efforts by telephoning a public agency in your area.

#7: REMOVE GRAFFITI

❖ **Sending a message to the neighborhood**

Gangs post graffiti to tell their enemies, "This is our turf. Stay out." Drug dealers use graffiti to advertise their business. Graffiti is a declaration of territorial ownership, and it is a message to the neighborhood: "we are taking over your neighborhood."

❖ **Sending a message to the gangs**

Residents in many neighborhoods aggressively seek out and remove graffiti, usually by painting over it. Removing graffiti silences the gang's declaration of ownership and interrupts the drug dealer's advertisements in your neighborhood. Removing graffiti sends a message back to the gangs: "this is our neighborhood. We won't let you take over."

❖ **Document the graffiti**

When graffiti appears in the neighborhood you should call the non-emergency police dispatch telephone number **831 471-1131** and report it. The police will photograph the graffiti and create a report that will be sent to the detectives who work on graffiti crimes. It is especially important to report the crime if you have information about who is responsible or if the graffiti is gang related.



❖ **Getting help removing graffiti**

Santa Cruz has a graffiti abatement program. The city employees' primary responsibility is to remove graffiti from public places but they will also remove it from private property if a property owner is unable to remove it him or herself. The city will also provide free paint and other materials to the property owner and neighbors to be used to cover or remove the graffiti. The Graffiti for Graffiti Free Santa Cruz is: **831 420-5303**.

Constant anti-graffiti action can greatly improve neighborhood moral and property values and it has a positive effect against gangs.

8: REMOVE ABANDONED CARS



Abandoned or derelict cars are an eyesore and a hazard, affecting the appearance and thus the value of the neighborhood. One small but important action you can take to reclaim your neighborhood is to remove abandoned vehicles from the street.

❖ **There are laws**

The California Vehicle Code requires that all vehicles moving or left standing on a highway or city street shall be currently registered. The Santa Cruz Municipal Code prohibits parking vehicles on city streets or alleys for more than 72 hours. These two requirements give the Police Department a great deal of authority in controlling abandoned vehicles in your neighborhood.

❖ **Reporting Violations**

The Police Department has an aggressive abandoned vehicle policy and is constantly working on the problem; however, your involvement is needed to make the policy work. When an abandoned vehicle is observed in your neighborhood it can be reported by telephoning the Abandoned Vehicle Hotline: **831 420-5863**.

❖ **Abatement Actions**

Once the Police Department is aware of a vehicle with an expired registration they can tag the vehicle, giving the owner 72 hours to move the vehicle off the street, or, if the registration is expired for more than 6 months, they can immediately tow the vehicle. If the vehicle is currently registered but appears to have not been moved for some time the owner will be given 72 hours to move it or have it towed away.

#9: REPLACE BROKEN STREET AND PARK LIGHTS

- **UNDER Cover of Darkness**



Gangsters and drug dealers may break or shoot out lights on streets or in parks so that they can do their business in the darkness where they are less easily seen. An important action you can take to interrupt gang and drug dealing activity in your neighborhood is to have street and park lights replaced.

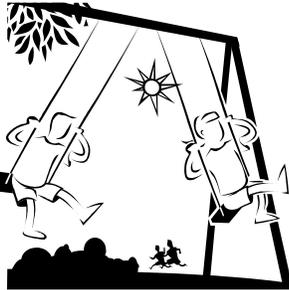
- **Call for Help with Lights**

Any one of several public agencies may be responsible for maintaining lighting in public places. Park and Recreation Department, Public Works Department, or even private property owners may be responsible for the lighting in your area. Figure out who is responsible for maintaining the lighting and give them a call. **831 420-5520.**

#10: STOP INAPPROPRIATE USE OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

- **Inappropriate Behavior in your Neighborhood Park**

Drug dealers, gangs, and drug users often use neighborhood parks. Or they may be used for public drinking and intoxication, making them undesirable for used by neighbors, families and children.



People in some neighborhoods say officers have been unavailable or reluctant to respond to their repeated calls about inappropriate behavior in their park. They believe officers have not acted firmly enough to deter problem behavior. But many times, when serious felonies take priority over infractions, officers are not available to respond to calls about inappropriate behavior. If you object to what is taking place in your neighborhood park, call

the police and ask for immediate assistance. The more you call the more the police will be aware of your concerns and the more likely they will be able to respond to the problems.