

## What is Suspicious Activity?

All too often citizens are confused about what they should report and why, so it is important to train citizens through a variety of reporting activities. After reviewing this section, participants will be able to advise citizens specifically on the appropriate who, what, when, where, and how of reporting. Often citizens ask officers “Why should I get involved?” or “How am I going to benefit by reporting suspicious activity?” Although the answers may seem obvious, it must be clearly communicated to the public that they are an essential component in protecting our communities. Sometimes our citizens receive mixed signals regarding what to report and when to report it. Other times they simply do not know what is expected of them. It is important to learn specific definitions and details to provide Watch volunteers with clear and concise information. Begin with defining “suspicious activity.” Suspicious activity can refer to any incident, event, individual or activity that seems unusual or out of place. Some common examples of suspicious activities can include:

- a stranger loitering in your neighborhood or a vehicle cruising the streets repeatedly.
- Someone peering into cars or windows.
- A high volume of traffic going to and coming from a home on a daily basis.
- Someone loitering around your parks and ponds, schools and secluded areas
- Strange odors coming from a vehicle, house or area
- Open doors or windows at closed business or vacant or unoccupied residence
- Someone tampering with electrical, gas or sewer systems without an identifiable company vehicle or uniform.
- Persons arriving or leaving from homes or businesses at unusual hours.
- Multiple persons who appear to be working in unison and exhibiting suspicious behaviors.
- Signs of forced entry or tampering with security or safety systems.

Any suspicious and criminal behavior needs reported to the police, [614-645-4545](tel:614-645-4545) and you need to request the officer takes a official police report and gives you the report number, so you can press charges.

The effectiveness of the police and sheriffs’ offices efforts is enhanced by active participation on the part of citizens. By calling to report suspicious persons or activity, you not only aid the police you make you community a safer place to live. Some people fail to call because they are not aware of activities that might be suspicious. Others may notice suspicious activity and hesitate to call for fear of being labeled a “nosy neighbor”. Still others take it for granted that someone else has already called. Always report suspicious activity and all crimes because police don’t know there’s a problem unless they are told.

## Knowing What and How to Report

There are four general categories to consider when determining what to report 1) suspicious activities, 2) people and vehicles; 3) illegal activities; 4) unusual events or incidents, dangerous situations.

By reporting these types of activities and situations, citizens can make their communities safer and more secure, reduce violence, minimize victimization, reduce crime, and improve the overall quality of life.

If you observe a crime in progress call 911

If need to report a crime which already occurred call [614-645-4545](tel:614-645-4545)

## When to Call 911 and When Not!

Calling 911 is an important communications tool for emergencies. However, some citizens call 911 in non-emergency situations. This can cause the dispatch operator miss a call of a person needing help. It is important that not only your groups but all citizens understand when to call and when not to call 911.

### When To Call

- Medical emergency (examples: chest pain, extreme shortness of breath, uncontrolled bleeding).
- Crime in progress
- Fire
- When a life is in danger

### When Not to Call

- Asking for telephone numbers of others
- Asking for Officer information or to call
- Asking for directions to hospital
- Asking the time of the day
- Asking about community activities and locations

If need can file your own police report online if non-felony and minor at [Columbuspolice.org](http://Columbuspolice.org)

## Observation Skills

Most people go through the day without even noticing everyday events. However beginning to recognize what is normal around you is the first step in recognizing what is not normal. Although law enforcement officers are trained observers, sometimes they find it difficult to explain to citizens what to report and when to report it. While patrolling the streets, officers get used to looking for activities or events that seem out of place or are not part of the regular or ordinary routine. Officers may not be able to articulate specifically what is unusual, but they are keenly aware that something is awry. Officers sometimes refer to this phenomenon as a “sixth sense” or “street smarts,” and they instinctively know when something is not right and they should investigate. Community members should know they have the ability to recognize unusual events as well. It is a matter of practicing Observation Skills to make them stronger.

In order to understand how to properly observe people, vehicles and incidents that may affect us, we should begin by learning what types of things to observe. You should pay attention to things like:

Physical setting – Specific location, time of day, day of week

People—What do they look like? (height, weight, ethnicity, gender, etc.) How many are there?

Specific items—What is important?

Routines—Did you noticed any recurring patterns or routines? How often did they occur? Who was involved?

One of the keys to a successful Neighborhood Watch program is recognizing the importance of using good observation skills to keep your neighborhood safe. Practice looking at pictures of people to know how to describe them. Clothing is important, but look for things that cannot be changed, like skin or eye color, tattoos, scars, moles, height and weight. Properly observing vehicles is similar to observing individuals. You always begin with

the basics, such as the make and model of the vehicle. Identify the vehicle as a Ford, Chevrolet, Dodge, Honda, Mercedes, Volvo, etc. Then identify the both the type of vehicle (such an SUV, pickup truck, etc.), as well as the specific model if possible (such as Corolla, Accord, Expedition, etc.) To remember license plates: write it on paper, on your hand, or even scratch it in the dirt! License numbers are useful only if they are

correct. Never hesitate to say, "I'm not sure". With a vehicle description, even a partial license plate can be valuable.

Community members only serve as the extra "eyes and ears" of law enforcement. They should report their observations of suspicious activities to law enforcement; however, citizens should never try to take action on those observations. Trained law enforcement should be the only ones ever to take action based on observations of suspicious activities.