



NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

OBSERVATION SKILLS

Community Training

Instructor's Book



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COURSE OVERVIEW – OBSERVATION SKILLS

Summary: Over the past thirty years, Neighborhood Watch has enhanced public safety by creating community-based partnerships to fight crime and improve the quality of neighborhood life. In a continuing effort to promote professionalism in law enforcement and to build positive police/community relations, the National Sheriffs' Association, in cooperation with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, is producing and distributing Neighborhood Watch Toolkits to law enforcement agencies across the nation.

This training is designed to build the capacity of law enforcement officers assigned to work with Neighborhood Watch groups by providing specific instruction on each of the sixteen courses presented in the Neighborhood Watch Toolkit.

This course will increase participants' skill levels by teaching them the proper utilization of the tools and the most effective methods of maximizing the course's value for themselves and their communities.

Time Allocated: 1 hour

Method of Instruction: This presentation will utilize adult learning methodologies including standard lecture, facilitated discussion and participant-based activities. Interactive discussion is encouraged, and activities are an integral component of this course. The training is displayed by PowerPoint presentation found on the Neighborhood Watch Toolkit Community CD. Tools and Handouts can be found on the CD or in the Appendix of this Handbook.

Instructional Resources Required:

- Facility: sufficient seating and tables for all participants
- Equipment: Presentation, Computer, LCD Projector, Screen
- Materials: Guide and Participant Book; Flip Chart for instructor and for each table or small group; blank paper and writing utensils for each participant

Terminal Learning Objectives: Participants will learn the importance of being observant; will learn observation skills that can be employed in Neighborhood Watch; and will understand that observation is the first step in reporting incidents or suspicious activities related to criminal activity or terrorism.

PARTNERS

This training is brought to you by the National Sheriffs' Association in cooperation with a grant provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U. S. Department of Justice.

The Neighborhood Watch Toolkit was designed and produced by the Community Safety Institute.

Before we begin the course, let's take a few moments to introduce ourselves to one another. My name is _____.

Instructor's Note:

All participants should introduce themselves by providing their name, agency and level of expertise with Neighborhood Watch. Please limit each introduction to no more than two minutes. Throughout the course during interactive discussions and activities, we will learn more about the participants and their work with Neighborhood Watch groups and volunteers within their communities.

OBSERVATION SKILLS

The topic today is **Observation Skills**. We will spend the next hour looking at understanding how observation skills are essential to reporting suspicious activity, and how to develop our observation skills. For years, citizen volunteers have stopped countless crimes and saved lives by becoming actively involved in protecting their communities through Neighborhood Watch. As the additional "eyes and ears" of law enforcement, Block Captains and their volunteers can help to reduce crime, improve safety, and increase the quality of neighborhood life by knowing what to report and how to report it.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, participants will:

- Learn the importance of being observant
- Learn observation skills that can be employed in Neighborhood Watch
- Understand that observation is the first step in reporting incidents or suspicious activities relating to criminal activity or terrorism.

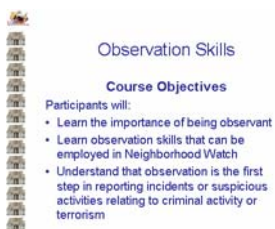
Slide #1



Slide #2



Slide #3



Slide #4



Observation Skills

What to observe:

- Physical setting
 - Specific location, time of day, day of week
- People
 - What do they look like? How are they acting?
 - How many of them?
- Specific items
 - What are they important?
- Routines
 - Did you notice any recurring patterns or routines? How often did they occur?
 - Who was involved?

OBSERVATION SKILLS

Before we begin a discussion on how to properly observe people, vehicles, and incidents that may affect us, we should learn what to observe:

- Physical setting – specific location, time of day, day of week
- People – What do they look like? How are they acting? How many of them are there?
- Specific items – What aspects are important?
- Routines – Did you notice any recurring patterns or routines? How often did they occur? Who was involved?

Slide #5



Observation Skills



ACTIVITY #1: OBSERVATION SKILLS

Let's try out our observation skills.
Look at the picture for 15 seconds.

Instructor's Note:

Leave the slide up for 15 seconds and allow participants to observe it in silence. Then proceed to the next slide. Write the answers to the questions on a flip chart.

Slide #6



Observation Skills

Answer the following questions regarding the previous picture

- Were there cars parked on both sides of the road?
- About how many cars were in the picture?
- Was anyone hurt?
- What color was the suspect vehicle?
- Was there a minivan?
- What type of damage was there to the vehicle?
- How many officers were in the picture?
- How many occupants were in the vehicle and what did they look like?

Now that we have just observed a scene, without turning back to the picture, let's answer these questions to see how much we observed:

- Were there cars parked on both sides of the road?
- About how many cars were in the picture?
- Was anyone hurt?
- What color was the suspect vehicle?
- Was there a minivan?
- What type of damage was there to the vehicle?
- How many officers were in the picture?
- How many occupants were in the vehicle, and what did they look like?

Observing an event such as this can be traumatic. Most people will focus on or “zero in” on the event and not think about other items that may be important, such as the number of occupants, the description of the occupants, or other valuable information such as the license plate number, or specific vehicle descriptors such as previous or new damage.

Review the picture again. How accurate was your observation?
Did you miss any details? Would it have been helpful to write
the information down as soon as you observed it?

HOW TO OBSERVE PEOPLE AND VEHICLES

One of the keys to a successful Neighborhood Watch program is recognizing the importance of using good observation skills to keep your neighborhood safe. In this section, we will present information that will improve your observation skills when observing people and vehicles.

The first step is to remain calm. Often in stressful situations individuals allow their fears or nerves to take control. It is crucial to stay calm, remain in control of your senses and be alert to your surroundings. Never place yourself in danger when you are observing possible suspicious or criminal activity. Remember, stay calm and remain alert to your surroundings.

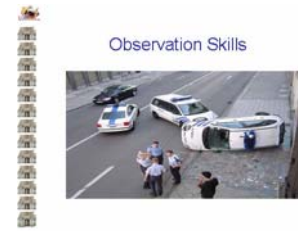
BEGIN WITH THE BASICS – PEOPLE

When observing people start with the basics... sex, race and approximate age. Although these categories are broad, it is amazing how many people can't describe even the most fundamental individual characteristics.

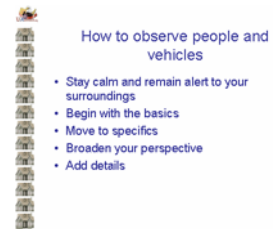
Repeat this process for all people observed (i.e. "three Hispanic females about fifteen years of age"). Once you have made a mental note or, better yet, taken a moment to write down the information, move on to more specific information.

Begin with the primary actor and then observe the others. The primary actor is the one who appears to be leading or controlling the incident.

Slide #7



Slide #8



Slide #9



Slide #10

Move to specifics - People

- Height
- Weight
- Clothing
 - Hat
 - Shirt
 - Pants
 - Shoes
- Hair and eye color
- Facial hair

Move to Specifics – People Make note of specific identifiers such as: height, weight, hair color, clothing description (shirt, pants and shoes). Once again, repeat this process as necessary for the number of individuals you are observing.

Slide #11

Broaden your perspective - People

- What other events are occurring?
- Who else is affected?
- What is the overall situation?

BROADEN YOUR PERSPECTIVE – PEOPLE

When you have recorded this information, take a moment to reorient yourself to the entire event. Stay alert and begin broadening your perspective.

Often observers become myopic or have “tunnel vision” when an incident occurs. This can be extremely dangerous and can significantly reduce the amount of information that you observe. Take a deep breath, step back if possible and broaden your perspective. What other events are occurring? Who else is affected? What is the overall situation?

Slide #12

Add details - People

- Vehicles
- Witnesses
- Location
- Direction of travel
- Outcome of the incident
 - Individuals injured or killed
 - Damage caused

ADD DETAILS – PEOPLE

Finally, the last step is to observe and record any other detailed information that may be beneficial to other officers or investigators.

Slide #13

Begin with the Basics - Vehicle

- Make
 - Ford, Chevrolet, Dodge, VW, Volvo, Lexus, Honda, Nissan, Mercedes
- Model
 - Maxima, Caprice, Navigator, Cutlass, Escape, Accord

BEGIN WITH THE BASICS – VEHICLE

Vehicles can actually be more difficult to observe because of the similarity between models by the various manufacturers and the lack of knowledge about automotive designs on the part of the observer. Many people cannot distinguish between a Ford and a Chevy, while others cannot tell the difference between one foreign car and another.

When it comes to vehicles, the only way to improve your observation skills is to spend time learning about the various makes, models, styles and types of vehicles that are on the road today. As observers, you may want to develop tools to help yourselves when describing various vehicles. One easy tool might be as simple as picking up guides from local car dealers on their types of vehicles, or locating an automotive magazine like "Auto Trader" that would show pictures of all types of vehicles and provide brief descriptions. Can you think of any other tools that might help you recognize and remember vehicles?

MOVE TO SPECIFICS – VEHICLE

Once you have established the Make and Model of the vehicle, you can move on to specific details such as the body style, color and overall appearance.

ADD DETAILS – VEHICLE

To complete your picture of the vehicle, we want to add as many details as possible, such as damage to the vehicle and if the damage appeared old (rusty) or new. Describe any bumper stickers you notice, or signs or lettering on the vehicle. Did it have a phone number listed to report accidents or comment on driving? Was there a company logo on the vehicle and can you describe it, or are you familiar with the company?

At this point we also want to add any details about the overall incident that the vehicle was involved in or the environment surrounding the scene. Were there multiple vehicles, what time of day was it, what were the weather conditions, what was the direction of travel? Did you see the occupants, and can you provide descriptions of them?

ACTIVITY #2: OBSERVATION SKILLS

Take a look at this picture. Anything out of the ordinary? Just a typical downtown scene, right?

Of course not! Upon closer inspection, you will observe that the vehicles on the far left side of the street are traveling away from you. This picture was taken in Australia, where the travel pattern is opposite of the United States. Did you notice this distinct difference at first glance?

Slide #14



Slide #15



Slide #16



Slide #17



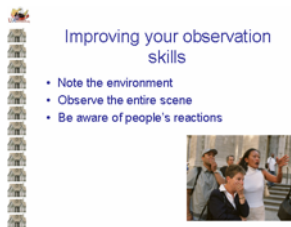
IMPROVING YOUR OBSERVATION SKILLS

There are numerous ways to improve your overall observation skills. One of the best is simply to practice by observing various events and then recalling the circumstances in a manner that would be beneficial to others during an investigation.

Other practices to assist with your observation skills include staying calm and being patient when observing an event. If you become overanxious or unduly upset, you may not be able to respond or assist if you are requested or required to do so.

Remember to pay attention to your overall surroundings so you can react appropriately if the circumstances should warrant it. Always be alert to specific incidents that may pose harm or be potentially dangerous (explosions, gas leaks, group turmoil).

Slide #18



IMPROVING YOUR OBSERVATION SKILLS

Note your general environment (inside, outside, night, day, rain- storm, snowing, or downwind exposure) and how it is affecting the incident.

Make sure that you actively work to avoid “tunnel vision” and observe the entire scene on a regular basis. This will give you a more accurate overall picture of the incident and will keep you from focusing in on only one or a few items.

Finally, be aware of people’s reactions to the incident. This information could be crucial during an investigation. For example, did someone calmly walk away from an explosion, did they speed away from an accident scene, or did they simply stand back and stoically watch the fire?

- Be patient
- Pay attention to your overall surroundings
- Be alert to specific incidents around you that might be potentially dangerous
- Observe the entire scene
- Be aware of people’s reactions

Before turning to the next slide: Explain the directions for the next Activity.

ACTIVITY #3: OBSERVATION SKILLS

Please select a partner to work with for the next activity. One member of each pair will look at the next slide for 15 seconds. The other person cannot look at the slide.

You now have 15 seconds to review this slide.

To the partner who was not allowed to view the slide:

You should have a blank piece of paper and something to write with in front of you.

The person who saw the slide will now describe what they saw to you and you will draw what they describe. You are not allowed to speak to your partner.

To the partner who saw the slide:

You are not allowed to look at your partner or what they are drawing as you describe what you saw to them.

How well did you do? Did you recall the artwork? Did you associate it with known objects or shapes? Did you get the colors correct? Did you manage to remember all of the shapes and the order that they were in?

As you can see from this activity, it is important to be an "active observer," one who makes it a point to look at a picture or event and works to remember the important elements or details. Citizens need to be good observers. Citizens must know how to communicate with law enforcement so that we can benefit from all of their observations concerning incidents, criminal activities, or even possible terrorist activities.

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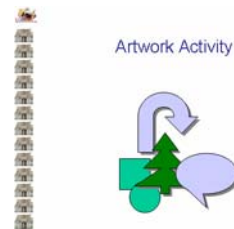


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Slide #20



Slide #21

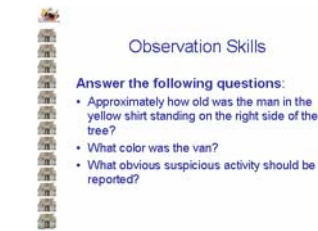


Slide #22



Leave slide up for 10 seconds.

Slide #23



Slide #24



ACTIVITY #4: OBSERVATION SKILLS

Let's look at this scene for the next 10 seconds.

Now let's answer these questions concerning the last picture:

- Approximately how old was the man in the yellow shirt who was standing on the right side of the tree?
- What color was the van?
- What obvious suspicious activity should be reported?

Let's look at the picture again. As you can see, there is no one wearing a yellow shirt standing on the right side of the tree. There is no van and no other obvious suspicious activity occurring that should be reported.

By directing the line of questions, many people will respond with answers they think they have or that they think others want to hear, instead of what they actually observed. This picture is nothing more than people walking in a park. No suspicious people, no van and no suspicious activities.

When reporting what you have observed, be on the lookout for "leading" questions. Poor investigative skills may lead law enforcement to ask these sorts of questions. Awareness of this reporting fallacy will help you avoid this sort of mistake.

You can always write down what you see so that you can be sure the information you give is accurate.

POST-OBSERVATION ACTIONS

After you have made your observations:

- If possible, write down your observations
- Record the date and time
- If activities appear to be unusual, suspicious, or illegal, call for assistance and take the appropriate action according to your agency's policies and procedures.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the course on observation skills. You should now be able to identify what types of activities to observe, how to properly observe people and vehicles, and how to communicate your information to others.

REGISTER TODAY!

To take advantage of Neighborhood Watch on-line services such as Neighborhood Watch manuals, articles on current events and other Neighborhood Watch resources, register your Neighborhood Watch group at www.USAonwatch.org.

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Post-Observation Actions

- If possible, write down your observations as soon as possible
- Record the date and time
- If activities appear to be unusual, suspicious or illegal, call for assistance and take the appropriate action according to your agency's policies and procedures

Slide #26



Summary

- What to observe
- Filtering
- How to observe
 - People
 - Vehicles
- Improving your skills
- "Just the Facts"
- Post-observation actions

Slide #27



Register Today

