

## PROPOSED MUTUAL WATCH PROGRAM

DRAFT

**OBJECTIVE:** Mutual Watch (MW) would be an organized effort by concerned Shareholder/Members to look out for each other's safety and to help police protect people and their property against criminals. It practices cooperation with each other and with GRF Security and SBPD in a common interest for safe homes and mutuals. Working together, neighbors learn how to safeguard each other's homes and reduce the risk of crime. They become more alert to unusual or suspicious circumstances, individuals, or vehicles. They learn that it is better to call the police when they see something suspicious, even if their suspicion proves unfounded, rather than to keep quiet and risk letting a neighbor be victimized by criminals.

Mutual Watch does not mean a Shareholder/Member taking physical action against a suspect to prevent criminal activity. As a member, your responsibility is to call the police and report what you've seen, not to take action yourself.

**BENEFITS:** Mutuals are made up of people who have the power to protect each other's safety and property. By reporting any suspicious circumstances to GRF Security and SBPD, members of a Mutual Watch actually increase their own safety.

Police cannot fight crime they do not know about. When alert citizens keep them informed, the police are far more effective against crime and citizens have better protection and safer mutuals. Join Mutual Watch to protect your home and stay safe.

**PRO:** Watches can supplement overstretched police forces. Reports of crimes may go up after the mutual watches are formed, but that's partly because citizens become more comfortable about calling police about incidents that would otherwise be overlooked—but shouldn't be. Watches need not be just about patrolling.

**CON:** Watches can expose homeowners to liability. One misstep by a watch member can have legal and financial repercussions for everyone in the neighborhood. Sometimes neighbors are too nosy. If people challenge everyone who is different in some way, they risk losing some of their humanity. There's a fine line between being alert and turning into a moderator of everyone else's behavior.

Sometimes bad apples join. While most mutual watch members will be civic-minded, not all are. Besides vigilantes and cop wannabes, criminals will occasionally join, since they can use the information they learn about neighbors' habits for illicit ends.

### **HOW TO START AND MAINTAIN A MUTUAL WATCH PROGRAM:**

The following steps explain how to get a Mutual Watch program started and maintained in your mutual:

**Talk to your neighbors** - See if there's interest in forming a Mutual Watch group in your mutual. Tell them about the benefits of a program and the problems to be addressed. Ask about convenient times and places for the first meeting. Be sure to mention that Mutual Watch does not require frequent meetings or personal risks.

**Plan the first meeting** - Select a date, time, and place for the first meeting. Meetings could be held at a home or clubhouse. Send out meeting announcements a few weeks ahead of the date. You can distribute fliers, make phone calls, or send emails. Send out reminders a few days before the meeting. Prepare an agenda and sign-in sheet for the first meeting. The meeting should last about one hour. Consider providing refreshments, e.g., cookies and coffee. The agenda should allow time for questions, answers, and other topics. Invite GRF Security.

**First meeting** - The first meeting is critical in forming of a group. All attendees should introduce themselves and sign a sheet with their names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses so they can be contacted about future meetings and activities. They should be assured that their personal information will not be given to anyone without their permission. Then the group should define the area to be covered and select a MW Captain or MW Co-Captains. The initial duties of the Block Captain or Co-Captains are to compile a membership list containing phone numbers and email addresses of the members.

**Continuing duties of the Block Captain or Co-Captains** - After the group is formed their duties will depend on their organizational skills and interests, and the nature and objectives of the group. The following are some possibilities: Recruit new members; Maintain a membership list; Keep members informed about crime and incidents that have occurred in the mutual; Try to see group members frequently; Establish and

maintain a phone tree with home and work numbers that group members can use to contact Shareholders/Members in an emergency; Develop an area activity profile to help members recognize unusual or suspicious activities in the area; Act as a spokesperson for the group; Serve as liaison with the GRF Security; Plan, announce, and facilitate meetings; Organize crime prevention activities, e.g., watching homes when residents are away.

**Subsequent Meetings and Activities** - Meetings of the whole group should be held each quarter. They can be held more often if there is information to be distributed and discussed, a problem to address, or a special event to be planned and held. The key to keeping a Mutual Watch group active is maintaining interest over time and communicating with members. Meetings can be scheduled to discuss specific crime prevention or other topics. GRF Security can also provide officers to discuss quality of life issues that affect the mutual.

Meetings can also be scheduled to address a serious incident in the area, or two or more less-serious incidents of the same type. Problem solving usually proceeds in the following steps:

**Discuss and Define** - What is the problem? Some examples are car break-ins and thefts, home burglaries, speeding, anything that affects the mutual's quality of life.

**Analyze and Identify** - What are the common elements of the problem? They could be time of day, location, kinds of offenders and victims, kinds of targets, access to targets, methods of defeating security measures, etc.

**Response** - How can the problem be addressed? What can be done to prevent recurrence or reduce the damage if it does recur? What agencies or organizations are responsible and should help in solving the problem? What are the best things to do for short- and long-term results?

**Assessment** - Did the problem go away? Was the damage reduced? If not, what else should be done?

## Current Crime Concerns

There has been a county wide increase in thefts/burglaries from parked vehicles. Most of the items that were stolen were in plain view inside the car and included cameras, iPods, GPS units, laptop computers, cell phones, garage door openers, purses, and wallets. These thefts are crimes of opportunity--and **YOU** can help prevent these thefts. Here are four things you can do:

Do not leave valuables in plain view in your car, no matter where you park. Do not assume that simply locking your car doors is enough to deter a thief. It only takes a few seconds for a thief to smash your window and grab whatever is visible.

Take all valuables with you or place them in your trunk, preferably before reaching your destination.

Lock your car and park in a well-lit area.

Report any suspicious activity, persons, and vehicles that you see in your mutual.

There also has been a county wide increase in residential burglaries often associated with unlocked doors and unsecured windows. You can help prevent residential burglaries too. Here are several things **YOU** can do:

Close and lock all doors even when you are home.

When leaving home do not leave windows open, not even a little.

Close and lock all windows.

Keep your home well lit at night. Have lights on at night (timers are convenient).

Have a motion sensor-activated light at your front door.

Close curtains when you leave.

Make your home appear occupied when you are out by leaving lights, TV, or radio on.

Remove valuables from places that can be seen from outside.

If you are going to be away for several days, let your neighbors know and arrange to have parcels picked up, newspaper delivery stopped or have your newspapers picked up daily.

Consider an alarm service or installing a motion activated audible alarm in the house

Most importantly, report all suspicious activity to the Security Department or to Seal Beach PD.

**YOU** are the eyes and ears of the community and reporting such activity may stop crimes before they are committed.