

How to Establish a Neighbourhood Watch or Rural Watch Group

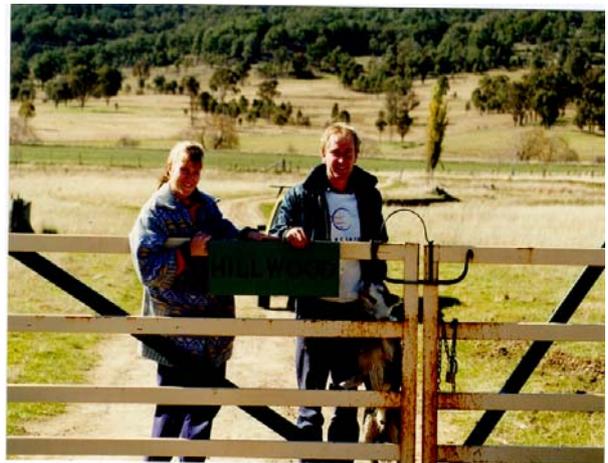
Neighbourhood Watch or Rural Watch schemes encourage people in the farming and rural community to be vigilant and to report anything suspicious to the police. People may observe a suspicious activity in their area, but they may not do anything about it because they don't know what to do, or may be unsure if their neighbours would appreciate their involvement. However, acting as extra eyes and ears for the police by reporting accurate descriptions of people and vehicles acting suspiciously is the basis for the police and community working together. Every small piece of information contributes towards the whole picture. In areas where residents are keen observers, police have a better chance of making arrests and solving crimes.

The Objectives Of Rural Watch

Rural Watch aims to:

- reduce preventable crime and reduce concerns about crime in the community,
- encourage the reporting of crime or suspicious activity,
- develop a greater sense of cooperation and responsibility between neighbours,
- enhance the relationship between police and the community,

- improve the level of farm security in the community,
- educate community members on relevant matters of law and community information; and
- encourage people to identify their property.



Some people think that because farms are more spread out and are not always visible to neighbours, Neighbourhood Watch programs in rural communities cannot work. This is not so – in fact it may work better. Country people are more accustomed to watching out for suspicious activities while driving back and forth in the district. A community that is organised and committed to crime prevention,

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can act as a deterrent to potential criminals who will be aware that a Rural Watch is in operation in a given area.

What you need to do

Contact your local Police Station for information on forming a group and to determine the need for, and interest in Rural Watch or Neighbourhood Watch. It is vitally important to have police involvement to ensure groups work.

- Discuss the program with several other people in your district who may be interested in participating in Rural Watch. You will need two or more people to begin to organise a group.
- Inquire if a similar program was held in the past. Was it a success or a failure? Why? What organisations and people were involved?
- Many farmers tire of going to meetings. It may be preferable to form a Rural Watch group as part of an existing organisation, such as the local Bush Fire Brigade, NSW Farmers, or Landcare.
- Discuss the proposal for the Rural Watch group with community leaders who may be interested. These people can introduce the idea to other key people in the community. This will not only inform others in the area but will give them an opportunity to raise any concerns about crime or the Rural Watch idea. People are reluctant to participate in projects they know little about, or in which they have no early input.
- Announce the proposed formation of a Rural Watch group for your district in your local paper and set a meeting date. Alternatively send invitations to those in your district.
- Free use of public meeting places is a possibility in many communities.
- Establish an organisational structure. Appoint a president, secretary, and treasurer. The need for committees will depend on the scope of the project in your district.

- Determine the scope of the project: the size of the area to be covered and the number of properties to be included.
- Record the number of properties and the area you wish to cover on a topographical map. These are available from your local council or Rural Lands Protection Board offices.

Ingredients for success

1. Every Neighbourhood Watch or Rural Watch group needs capable and dedicated program leaders to organise meetings and maintain enthusiasm amongst members.
2. Cooperation from local police is essential. Police will guide you on what types of crime are concerns in the district, such as livestock theft or vandalism and what should be done about it.
3. A cooperative local press, including newspapers, radio and television stations can serve the essential function of alerting the community to the purpose of Rural Watch and the places and dates of meetings. If presented as a news item, it saves on paying advertising fees.
4. Tailor the crime prevention programs for the needs of your local community, the varying types of agricultural production and the type of terrain. For example, in areas where properties are large and the distance between neighbours is great, a UHF Rural Watch group may be more appropriate.

Initiatives you can begin

- Promote programs such as farm and home security checks, property inventories and identification on all machinery tools and equipment, security locks, lights or alarms, rubbish dumping prevention and others.
- Contact the South Australian Neighbourhood Watch Organisation, which has a wide range of information on

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crime prevention programs that you can distribute, and safety devices you can purchase. URL: <http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/>

- Display signs on your property boundaries that show you are a member of Rural Watch.
- Encourage farmers and their employees to be security conscious, and look out for strange vehicles – a registration number may give the police a vital lead.
- Ask local police to come to your property and conduct a security audit.
- Encourage local police to distribute information about crime on farms in your district either through the local media or send it directly to farmers using mailing lists of existing organisations, such as NSW Farmers or Landcare. Perhaps a local agribusiness may be happy to include information in with the mail out of their monthly accounts.
- Maintain publicity through the media by announcing special meetings, guest speakers and encouraging feature stories and letters to the editor regarding positive experiences of people involved in Rural Watch.

Acknowledgment:

These crime prevention strategies have been developed from the ideas and tried and true initiatives given to us by farmers across New South Wales. We sincerely thank them for their valued contribution. Additional material has been drawn from the South Australian Neighbourhood Watch Association.

URL: <http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/>

For more information, or if you wish to comment on the material in this leaflet, or if you have any other suggestions for crime prevention strategies on farm, please contact Elaine Barclay at:

THE INSTITUTE FOR RURAL FUTURES

University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351

Telephone: Freecall 1800 652 592
Facsimile: (02) 6773 3245
Email: ebarclay@metz.une.edu.au



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