

## FAQ: Tips from Crime Prevention Specialist, Pam McCreary

### **Do neighborhood watch groups work?**

Yes, they can really help neighbors become more aware of what's happening in the area. However, if you see suspicious activity call the police first, and then notify the neighborhood group. If you sign up to be the Block Ambassador, remember it's not a full time position and that you don't have to be best friends with all of your neighbors, you just are helping to make sure the block runs smoothly. One benefit of neighborhood groups, is they can provide maps with the addresses and phone numbers of residents on the block. Then when someone calls the police they know the exact address of the house and who lives there.

### **What classifies as suspicious activity?**

- Person loitering in your neighborhood that you don't recognize
- Persons loitering around cars, peering into them, or checking doors
- Alarms sounding or glass being broken
- Apparent business transactions being conducted from a vehicle
- Someone going into a neighbor's yard, looking into windows, checking doors of the house or garage
- Abandoned vehicle parked in your neighborhood
- Someone seen with a weapon

### **Should I call 911 if I see suspicious activity?**

Yes! Call 911 right away because it's better to err on the side of safety. When you call you will reach the Ramsey County Dispatch Center where they will record your information and send out an officer. Don't think that by calling you're bothering the police and don't be embarrassed if your suspicions prove unfounded. Officers want to know what's going on in the neighborhood and by calling you're helping them to do their job. It is also important to remember when reporting suspicious activity you are reporting a behavior, not profiling a person.

### **Should I call back if I see something else?**

Yes, if you get more information, such as if the suspect has cut a screen, or broken a window, make sure to call again so that they can update your status and send out an officer more more quickly. All calls can remain anonymous and the officer will go to the house where you reported the suspicious activity, not to your personal home. If you desire, you can be updated about the case by giving the dispatcher your phone number.

### **What kind of descriptions should I give when I call?**

Give as much information as you remember. When reporting suspicious vehicles it is important (if possible) to note the color, model, style, plate number and any identifying marks. When reporting suspicious persons, note hair color and length, eye color, glasses, facial hair, complexion, tattoos or scars, language or accent, hat, shirt color, coat, pant length, shoes or boots.

### **How can I better protect my house?**

Good lighting is key because it deters criminals. You can get dusk to dawn lights, or motion detector lights. Also, Xcel Energy will install and maintain lights in alleyways for a small price. However, one of the easiest things to do is simply to lock your doors, windows, garages and cars. If you have a security system use it, even if you are gone for just a short time.

**Theft from vehicles are very common, how can I avoid these?**

It is easy to prevent theft from vehicles. Make sure you don't leave anything in your car, even small change. Anything left in your car is fair game. Make sure to put your valuables in the trunk before arriving at your destination, because often thieves will watch parking lots to see if people place valuables in the trunk.

**How do I protect against package delivery theft?**

It's best to have the package sent to a secure location such as your work, or a request that the package be held at the local post office. If you have a neighbor who is often home you can coordinate with them about your package deliveries.

**How can I protect against general theft?**

Most expensive items such as computers, jewelry and bikes will have serial numbers. Make sure to catalog these numbers. Knowing the serial number of an item will drastically increase your chance of having the item returned. Often times, when bikes are stolen they are ditched soon afterwards. If you report a bike theft with the serial number your chances of getting it back are much higher. With modern technology it's really easy to simply take photos of the items and/or serial numbers.

**Can you tell me more about the Vacation Watch program?**

Vacation Watch a free program provided by St. Paul Police Reserve Officers. The Reserve Officers are trained civilian volunteers who provide many services to the community and assist police. If you're going to be away from home for 2-30 days you can register for the Reserve Officers to check on your home by calling the Community Services Unit at (651)-266-5485 and asking for Vacation Watch.

**Can I get someone to come and check and see how safe my house is?**

Yes, you can call the St. Paul Police Department Community Services Unit at (651)-266-5485. You can schedule an appointment and a Reserve Officer will come to your home and give you tips on how to make it more safe.

**Where should I call to report graffiti?**

To report existing graffiti can call the Department of Safety and Inspection (DSI) at (651) 266-8989 or email at <http://www.stpaul.gov/> and select 'I want to,' and then 'Ask A Question/Report A Problem.' If you see graffiti vandalism in progress call 911. To file a police report for graffiti vandalism to your property, call the Ramsey County non-emergency number at (651) 291-1111.

**What can I do to help make my kids safer?**

Talk to your children about their neighborhood boundaries. Teach your children to not be afraid to say NO to a stranger and to yell if they are in trouble. Teach your children their full names, addresses, and phone numbers.