

Cottage Watch Manual



Introduction

Cottage Watch (CW), like other Watch programs, is a police supported initiative. Assistance in establishing a local CW program is available from the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Crime Prevention Section, through your Regional Business and Finance Manager or through the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA). FOCA and the OPP are partners in CW. A program delivered by local community groups.

Background

Cottage break and enters, damage and theft are serious concerns impacting police, cottagers, cottagers' associations and insurance companies. In 1993, the South Porcupine OPP detachment took steps to address the issue with the implementation of the first CW program.

Based on this initial success, the Cottage Watch program was implemented by Sr. Constable Alex Malcolm in the Bracebridge OPP Detachment area in 1997. Bracebridge detachment adopted this three tier program in the Muskoka area to assist in reducing the rate of cottage break and enters, property thefts and damage caused by these crimes in cottage areas. The Cottage Watch program incorporates:

- Property identification
- Cottagers reporting suspicious events as they are happening first to police by dialing 911 and then the Zone Coordinator
- Community patrols

These are all brought together through effective partnerships within the cottage community. FOCA and the OPP agreed upon a partnership to develop a provincial Cottage Watch network to support the crime prevention efforts of all cottagers' associations. Since that time, an agreement has evolved and between FOCA and the OPP and the Solicitor General and Minister of Correctional Services which recognizes FOCA and the program as partners in this provincial initiative, designed to reduce the victimization of break and enters.

The objectives of the Cottage Watch program are to:

1. Involve cottage associations in self-help crime prevention and fire safety.
2. Organize cottage association members into effective cottage watch groups.

3. Improve communications between seasonal property owners, the OPP and other policing authorities.
4. Reduce the incidence of theft, damage, and break-ins.
5. Assist the police in crime prevention and detection.
6. Promote fire safety for rural properties, and the use of smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors in cottage properties.
7. Promote the use of engravers and property identification measures to help solve crimes.
8. Publicize the program and its successes.

Implementation

It is important to set realistic and achievable goals for local programs and to identify ways to build strong community support for the Cottage Watch (CW) program. Making effective use of existing community resources is essential when implementing CW, as this is not a police run program. These community groups can serve as a source of funds, resources and most importantly, a platform to spread the word. Several items are an integral part of the program and are necessary to ensure the program's success including:

- Cottage Watch Street Signs
- Cottage Watch Implementation Guide
- Pamphlets
- Home/Cottage Security Pamphlets
- Window Stickers
- Meeting Notices
- Meeting Letters

In order to run a Cottage Watch program, some funds may be required. Costs for street signs, manuals, etc. may be supported by local municipal governments, FOCA and/or a local sponsor. Fund raising or charging residents a fee are other alternative ways to secure funding.

It will be necessary to identify a Cottage Watch Coordinator, and in many cases a full-time resident is a logical choice. In most cases, the Coordinator is a volunteer.

Four steps have been identified for implementing a local Cottage Watch program. The following summary identifies steps for police, cottagers and cottagers' associations to take to assist each other in this endeavor. A successful program has the following support:

- Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA)
- Ontario Provincial Police
- Local Cottagers' Associations
- Local Cottagers

While the local OPP detachment should be involved during implementation, the responsibility for carrying out the program rests with the community. Once a community leader has been identified, implementation can begin. The leader should become familiar with all aspects of Cottage Watch and the recommended implementation steps.

The key elements of a successful Cottage Watch are:

1. **Volunteers:** You will need a Cottage Watch Coordinator, Area Coordinators, and typically a CW Committee (in some Watch areas a Committee may not be necessary)
2. **Cottage Owners:** participation within a Watch usually consists of 50-75 cottages, but some Watches may be bigger or smaller, depending on the neighbourhood, geography, property density etc.
3. **Effective communications** a Watch is divided into zones to make communication easier. Each zone will encompass approximately 7-10 cottages and have a Zone Coordinator and a Co-Coordinator if possible.

Community Roles and Responsibilities

The primary objective of the Cottage Watch program is to build communities of cottagers willing to protect each others' interests. It is a community-based crime prevention program that is organized and operated by concerned residents. All participants are encouraged to:

- Become more aware of criminal activities which have or, might occur in the area
- Be alert to suspicious persons or vehicles
- To be assertive of their right to enjoy their leisure activities in a safe and secure environment which is free from crime

These are accompanied by steps to improve cottage security including property identification. While Cottage Watch can increase community safety, it does not advocate citizen patrols or vigilantism. Police are still responsible for confronting suspicious individuals and making any necessary arrests.

The success of the program relies on the involvement of the community to be aware of, and follow the program, plus the active participation of volunteers to be Zone Coordinators. Outlined below are the specific duties of the Zone Coordinator, Co-Coordinator and Watch Member.

Cottage Watch Coordinator

- Overall coordination of the local CW Program
- Liaison with Detachment CW Coordinator

- Receive and log information from Area Coordinators

Zone Coordinator

The Coordinators job is to act as a liaison between the residents within their area and the CW Coordinator. It is not a huge time commitment or a lot of work. If break and enters, acts of vandalism or other situations occur; the Zone Coordinator reports the incident to the CW Coordinator who then alerts the Police and other Zone Coordinators if required. The Coordinator will:

- Communicate with cottagers in the zone to become familiar with usual activity patterns
- Report information received from homeowners to Area Coordinator
- Communicate relevant information to occupants in the zone
- Encourage new cottagers to become involved in the Watch.
- Distribute stickers
- Distribute the "Mutual Protect" Property Marking Engravers

Zone Co-Coordinator

- Back up for the Zone Coordinator.
- A second phone contact in case of emergency.

Cottage Watch Member

- Be a good neighbour by getting involved and by being aware.
- Know general patterns of neighbours, particularly in the immediate zone.
- Report suspicious events as they are happening first to police. Dial 911 and then the Zone Coordinator.

STEP ONE – Understanding

To set up and work with the Cottage Watch program in your area, all participants must become familiar with the program. Each participant: the police, cottagers and cottagers' association, must understand the "who, what, where, when, why and how's" of the program.

What is Cottage Watch?

A community crime prevention program that includes:

- property identification or "target hardening"
- community patrols and involvement
- police support
- the promotion of cottage safety and security
- A partnership between the OPP, FOCA, your association, local cottagers and corporate sponsors

Who Is Involved In Cottage Watch?

- cottagers
- your cottagers', road or lake association
- the OPP
- Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA)

Why Does Cottage Watch Work?

- reduces incidents of theft, damage and break-ins
- increases ownership of the problem by stakeholders
- creates a team environment - a key to any successful program
- assists the OPP in crime detection and prevention
- identifies property for easy recognition and recovery
- creates a safe living environment and reduces fear of victimization

STEP TWO – Analysis - Obtaining Information within your community

To effectively work with the Cottage Watch program, you must know where to find the required information on your community, the layout of your area, find out who are full time and seasonal residents and the available resources. Obtaining demographic and geographical information will assist in providing a clearer picture of the "who, what, when, where, why & how's" to assist in developing your program.

Identifying the sources of support and assistance for establishing and working with the program is critical. Locating partnerships within the existing community will support the ongoing requirements and assist in sustaining the program.

- your own knowledge of the area, neighbours, resources, problems
- your local Municipal Office
- your local OPP detachment
- existing police-community partnerships
- other neighbours on your lake, cottage road or waterway
- obtain information on the programs, resource material etc. from FOCA

You should identify community characteristics including:

- demographics and geographical information
- statistical data, victimization rates, crime history, and patterns
- occurrence rates, types
- population - full time, seasonal residents

To be effective in the implementation of a Cottage Watch program, the need to involve other organizations, groups or businesses is critical. Many organizations

are very willing to participate and are in an excellent position to act as the eyes and ears of the police and community patrollers. Examples of such organizations are:

- Ontario Hydro, Bell Canada, Utility Companies
- Municipal Roads Department Workers
- Local Real Estate Boards
- Local Contractors, Builders Associations
- Landscaping Companies
- Student and Seniors' Organizations

What do they offer?

- eyes and ears, community patrols
- knowledge of available resources
- the area and who should be there, or shouldn't
- off-season support and contact for local police
- continuity from year to year within the program

STEP THREE – Developing Infrastructure

This involves forming a Committee, identifying who is interested in participating in the program, recruiting volunteers, identifying a chairperson or contact person and establishing a committee structure.

At this point, you will have a good idea of which groups and individuals are available or interested in participating and/or further examining the benefits of setting up a Cottage Watch program. Items for consideration at this point include:

- establishing an organizing committee
- identifying a chairperson or contact person
- commitment for attendance at the first meeting
- record individual and group participants
- targeted activities with designated persons
- responsible and completion dates
- record agreed upon items and tasks,
- identify next steps
- detailing proper procedures for property identification
- procedures on community patrols
- actions to take if you see a crime etc.

Liaison with the local OPP detachment is critical for establishing many of the actual procedures identified above. Existing policies and guidelines have been established in these areas and are easily obtained from the local OPP detachment.

STEP FOUR- Training (Promoting Awareness)

Effective communication is a vital step. In this step, you make your first and most important announcement of the Cottage Watch program. As in every situation, **you only have one chance to make a first impression**. The effective use of available media or communications venues is very important, as is the message you deliver. Here are some possible ways of communicating and promoting your first meeting

By the Community

- local radio, newspapers, cable channels
- community meetings, in newsletters
- posters or flyers in prominent areas
- utility or tax bills

By the OPP

- through community presentations
- delivering pamphlets during investigations
- by marine or snow vehicle patrols
- general patrols

The Presentation/Meeting

The presentation should be conducted in partnership with the OPP and the participating organizations (e.g. cottagers' association or other group)

You have arranged the meeting and have representation from many of the areas or organizations that may assist with your Cottage Watch program. It is important to inform everyone on the benefits and value of establishing such a program.

Cottagers should clearly understand why they should commit their time and efforts to this program.

The presentation should cover the important facts about the program. Remember to highlight the benefits to participants and the community. Hand-outs are extremely important. They allow the attendees to walk away with a copy of the verbal information provided, and supporting literature to read at a later date.

Training

Training supporters such as police, volunteers, local partners in problem solving, running meetings, planning etc. is a critical step.

Once you are ready to commence the actual implementation of the Cottage Watch program, all the information you need should be available i.e. knowledge of the program, the resources, volunteers, police support, statistics, committee structure and copies of the presentation and materials.

Remember, the success of Cottage Watch relies on a commitment by you, your neighbours, and local partners. Crime Prevention is our shared responsibility – don't be the victim of crime.



Sample Resources

And

Templates



MAINTAINING THE ORGANIZATION

- Ask the experts – the cottagers themselves. Find out what they want and get their ideas on how their goals can be accomplished and what resources they need to do it.
- Encourage people to speak up and participate.
- Involve the youth in your community projects. Young people, who are involved in community, will maintain this sense of responsibility throughout life. This is building on the future.
- Hold community event. Invite cottagers to come out to a community BBQ, party, holiday event, picnic etc. Get to know your neighbours. Promote these events through newsletters, flyers delivered door-to-door by volunteers, notices posted in local stores, etc.
- Be patient. Start small. Be realistic about what you can accomplish in a given time frame, take small steps and build on your successes.
- Always make your volunteers feel useful and needed and appreciated. Hold volunteer appreciation events, send our thank notes. Acknowledge them and thank them often. This is not a one person show.
- Be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances. If one approach or strategy doesn't work, try something else, they are not failures but they are learning experiences.
- Ask for help – ask people to help with specific tasks. Find out what they're good at and use those skills and abilities.
- Be visible in the neighbourhood, get out and meet people and make connections. Knock on doors, introduce yourself, get to know the people who live in the neighbourhood, find out whom they know (who are their neighbours and nearby friends). Tap into informal neighbourhood networks. Connect neighbours to each other.

Build local partnerships with schools, churches/places of worship, police, service organizations etc. by meeting people connected with these groups – e.g. take a cottager with you and introduce yourself to school principals, church pastors, and leaders of other organizations, tell them what you're doing and find out what they're doing. Look for ways to work together

DORMANT AND DEFUNCT WATCHES

A Watch ceases to function when it is no longer an identifiable group of neighbours bonded together in order to reduce crime.

As soon as it becomes apparent that apparent that a Watch has ceased to function, its supporting Crime Prevention Officer / Detachment Cottage Watch Coordinator will undertake the process to assist in rejuvenate it. If this process fails, then the Watch must be formally terminated, and the Watch signage removed.

Why is the formal termination necessary? Since significant resources are being committed to crime prevention programs, it is important for the police and the public to know whether a program is a success or a failure. One indicator of success in the Neighbourhood Watch Program is the total number of registered Watch members. For this number to be meaningful and reliable, it is necessary to maintain accurate membership lists of all functional Watches.

When to Call Police

One of the hardest things for Watch members to learn is to trust their instincts. If it looks suspicious — don't hesitate — call police. Some people fear that raising a false alarm will reflect poorly on them. Not so. It's okay to inform police about something that "looks a bit fishy," and let them take it from there.

Look at the other side of the coin — how would you feel if you didn't call to report your suspicions, and, as a result, failed to prevent a criminal act in your neighbourhood? How would you feel if a neighbour failed to prevent a criminal act on your property?

Even when a crime has already been committed, some people are still reluctant to inform the police. Maybe they think it's not worth the hassle to report some graffiti or a stolen snow blower. Maybe they're too embarrassed to admit that they lost money to a disappearing driveway paving salesman or a smooth-talking telemarketer. But these are exactly the sorts of crime that your neighbours and the OPP should be made aware of. Residents can state that they don't want police to visit their home as a result of the call. If you don't want to call the police, then at least inform your Zone Coordinator or Area Coordinator. If people are informed about crimes being committed in their neighbourhoods, they become more vigilant and are less likely to be victimized.

Typical criminal activities that may occur in your neighbourhood include:

- break and entry into homes, motor vehicles, garages and sheds
- vandalism or destruction of property
- public disturbances
- family violence
- child abuse
- fraud
- physical or sexual assaults
- illicit drug transactions
- thefts of all kinds, including outdoor equipment and bicycles.

One of the better accomplishments of Neighbourhood Watch has been the elimination of vandalism and rowdiness within well-operated Watch areas.

How to Report a Crime or Suspicious Activity

Whether you're calling to report a crime in progress or just something that arouses your suspicion, remember the following Do's and Don'ts:

DO

- identify yourself as a Cottage Watch member;
- be prepared to describe the persons, vehicles or circumstances as fully as possible;
- ask for an "incident" number to facilitate a follow-up inquiry at a later date;
- record the time and date of your call;
- keep the suspects and incident under surveillance from a safe distance until police arrive;
- make a second call if the activity gets worse; and
- inform your Zone Coordinator or designate when time permits.

DON'T ATTEMPT APPREHENSION OR PURSUIT

DON'T ATTEMPT TO CONFIRM YOUR SUSPICIONS by approaching a home or vehicle where a crime may have taken place, or may still be in progress.

Go immediately to a safe distance, call 9-1-1 and wait for the police. If you approach the scene of a crime, you may encounter a dangerous criminal, or destroy useful evidence. For example, Police Canine Unit tracking dogs can only follow the trail of the last person who was on the scene.

Make the right call	
Every call is important, but not all calls are life threatening, and not all calls are police emergencies. Whatever, we're here to help. You have a role to play: "Make the Right Call".	
Life Threatening Emergency Or Crime in Progress	Non Emergency
911	1-888-310-1122



Cottage Watch Registration Form

Cottage Watch Sign-up Sheet

Zone Coordinator: _____

Home Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Area canvassed: _____

Name	Address	Telephone Number	Email Address

Zone Coordinator Do's and Don'ts

Cottage Watch

Zone Coordinator and Co-Coordinator Duty Sheet

- Give each cottager in your zone your name and phone number and also the name and phone number of Co-Coordinator
- When someone new moves into the zone, provide them with the Cottage Watch guide and introduce yourself giving them the necessary phone numbers and explain the program.
- Deliver any new information to the residents in your area.
- Always keep your records up to date

COORDINATORS AND CO-COORDINATORS CAN WORK, TRAVEL OR BE JUST AS ACTIVE AS THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN. YOU WILL BE CALLED ONLY TO RELAY INFORMATION ABOUT AN INCIDENT IN YOUR ZONE...IF EVERYONE DOES A LITTLE BIT THE JOB IS EASY

Cottage Watch Members Responsibilities

Apply the suggestions on crime prevention included in the information package so their own cottage will be more crime-proof.

Call police if they see a crime being committed, if they suspect that a crime may be committed, or if a crime has been committed. You are encouraged to call the police even if you consider the crime to be minor or “your own fault” i.e. “well, if I left the rake out, no wonder someone stole it”. They may call their Zone Coordinator if they have particular concerns about their neighbourhood or questions about the program

What Cottage Watch Members DO NOT DO

They DO NOT chase down criminals themselves; they simply call the police. Many people hesitate to call the police because they don't like to leave their name with the dispatcher. Don't worry; the police DO NOT give out your name.

They do not give up their privacy i.e. if you are going on vacation you may like to ask a trusted neighbour to collect your mail or watch your house for you but you do not have to inform all the members in your neighbourhood that your house is empty

Goal of the Cottage Watch Program

TO PREVENT CRIME: by taking care to protect yourself, i.e. porch light, adequate door locks, engraving valuables

TO DETER CRIME: by means of signs to the entrance of Cottage Watch areas, keeping the area looking maintained and cared for

TO BE INFORMED: if the police have noticed a particular crime “trend” in your community they will notify the Cottage Watch Coordinator who will then ask that the Zone Coordinators call all members on his/her list

**REMEMBER: WORKING TOGETHER WE CAN
PREVENT CRIME- IT WORKS**



Sample Letter

Dear Cottage Watch Participants,

The crime problem in our nation is both costly and demoralizing. Directly or indirectly, we are all affected by crime that has caused injury, financial loss and intimidation. These situations demonstrate vividly the need for community involvement and assistance in crime prevention, reporting and efforts in the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Cottage Watch Program.

This community-based crime prevention program is a simple and direct approach toward protecting our community from criminal attacks. The program involves the reduction of criminal opportunity through citizen participation in crime prevention measures, such as being alert and aware, reporting suspicious and criminal activity to the police, and initiating actions which reduce criminal opportunity.

In these times of reported apathy within our communities, it is encouraging to find the concern and involvement you and your neighbours display with your Cottage Watch efforts. The Ontario Provincial Police and the Federation of Ontario Cottagers Association stand ready to assist and support you with this program.

Again, I welcome and appreciate your efforts toward making xxxxxxxxxxxx a safer place to live and visit.

Yours truly,

OPP Detachment Commander
P.S. For assistance with your area's program, call
(XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX)

Sample Notice

**Cottage Watch
MEETING NOTICE
It Is Time To Stop
Burglary, Break-Ins, Vandalism**

WHERE:

WHEN:

TIME:

An officer from the OPP will discuss cottage security and discuss how we can protect our property.

It Takes All Of Us To Work Together

On This Project!

Please Try To Attend!

(Contact Name)

(Contact Number)

Date _____

Dear Member:

There will be a meeting of your local Neighbourhood Watch this month. The meeting will be held at the following location (xxxxxxxxxxx). The time of the meeting is ____p.m. on _____.

We are looking forward to seeing you at this meeting.

Detachment Commander

Media Suggestions

Purpose of a News Release:

1. **Attract the media's attention** – The essential information – the who, what, where, why and how needs to be presented in the heading and the first paragraph of the release. The remaining paragraphs provide filler which can help a reporter to flesh out a story.
2. **Help the media get it right** – This ensures that times, dates, spelling of names and places can be reported correctly.
3. **Provide a brief description of your organization** – A brief description of your organization is placed at the end of the news release. It tells the media who you are and what you do.
4. **Provide the media with a contact person** – The media needs to know who they can call for more information or for an interview. This person needs to be available and be willing to be interviewed by reporters.

Media Tips

- Know your local media; their names, title, department, phone number. Send your release to a named individual and develop a relationship with that person.
- Know their deadlines
- Make sure your information is newsworthy
- Highlight the local relevance of your issue/event. Ask yourself “How are people going to relate to this or what does it really mean for them?”
- Send a news release out as early in the day as possible...the media is hungry for story ideas then. This will also allow you to meet the media's deadline.
- Consider which editorial desk your news release should go to. Often the news desk is not your only choice. There may be other interested desks: family, life, education, community calendar, etc.

Writing a News Release

If you want your news to stand out, it must contain straightforward items with news value. A catchy heading on your release coupled with an interesting first paragraph should do the trick.

- The headline generally is a brief, active statement in capital letters and centered on the page, designed to get attention.
- Make sure the first 10 words of your release are effective, as they are the most important.
- Avoid excessive use of adjectives and technical jargon.
- Deal with the facts – let the reporter do their job and “write the story”.
- List the benefits of your product/service/event and what makes your event or organization unique or different.

- Include an interesting quote from the head of your organizing committee, or from a person who your event/group directly affects.
- Whenever possible, keep the release to one page in length, double spaced. To indicate the end of the news release, type ‘ – 30 – ‘ centered at the bottom of the release.
- If the release runs onto more than one page, make sure the pages are numbered. On all subsequent pages, a small descriptive header should be included in the top left-handed corner, along with a short description, page number and total number of pages. For example: “Mr. Smith wins award -- page 2 of 2.”
- The final part of the news release is the Contact Information. Provide as much information as possible: contact name, address, phone number, fax number, email address, website. This is the person the media will call to arrange an interview, to clarify, or to provide more detailed information.

Planning for a Meeting

There’s nothing more frustrating than arriving for a meeting that seems disorganized with no clear agenda or purpose for the meeting. Most of us are feeling “metinged out” these days and we want to ensure that our time is well spent and interesting.

If you are the one planning to host the meeting then ask yourself if the meeting is necessary or if the same results could be achieved through another means. If you decide to go ahead with a meeting then:

- What do you hope to achieve? (objectives for meeting)
- Who should attend?
- What information will be shared? Are there documents to be reviewed before the meeting?
- What decisions need to be made and in what order?
 - Use the early part of the meeting, when people are more energized, for those key items that will require lively discussion;
 - If possible, start with an item that will unite the group with a quick decision and then tackle the tougher agenda items;
 - Specify how many minutes you hope to spend on each agenda item.
- What process tools do you want to use to meet your objectives (group brainstorming, problem analysis, appreciative inquiry, consensus decision-making, priority setting, action planning)?
- What are the practical considerations - meeting time, location, refreshments, contacting participants?

If you have taken the time to ask yourself these questions then you should have a clear purpose, agenda, timing for each agenda item and priority decisions that

you hope to walk away with at the end of the meeting. By sending the agenda out a few days in advance, members are prepared and can let you know if they wish to add any items to the agenda.

Sometimes the best meetings happen when there's a clear agenda combined with some spontaneity. One neighbourhood facilitator decided at the last minute that they needed to attract more people to an important meeting discussing the rejuvenation of a lagging cottage association. The facilitator knew that many of the residents had attended too many meetings already. They were tired of meetings and tired of organizing childcare. It wouldn't matter how well they planned the agenda, the turnout was likely to be poor. So the facilitator changed the venue and organized a gathering at Kids World where the children could play while the parents gathered in a room

Chairing a Meeting

Once you've set the agenda, your role is one of paying attention to the tasks and the group process. Here are some tips for a smooth meeting:
Monitor the flow by keeping an eye on the time and the tasks to be accomplished;

- Ensure that everyone who wants to speak is heard
- If the topic is sparking vigorous discussion then keep a speakers list beside you so people know that their wish to speak has been noted and they will get their turn.
- Another approach is to go around the table allowing each person to speak to the issue one at a time;
- Keep the group the focused - refer to the group's Terms of Reference or ground rules if necessary;
- Summarize the decisions made, the results to be achieved, the actions to be taken, by whom and when;
- Adjourn the meeting with the next meeting date in place.
- Meetings aren't just about tasks and process. The social benefits of working together are critical for sustaining the passion and commitment that's needed for community work. Enjoying ourselves and having fun are primary reasons for people to volunteer. If the social element tends to take your group off track during meetings, then acknowledge its importance by inviting people to come together for fifteen minutes either before or after the meeting. Offer snacks and schedule your chat time right into the agenda.

