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Rural Neighborhoods for Crime Prevention

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There is increasing concern throughout the state for the growing incidence of burglary, theft and vandalism in rural areas. Whatever the reasons, these crimes have increased sharply in the past few years. Rural residents are taking steps to assist law enforcement officials to deal with this growing problem. These efforts have come to be known as neighborhood crime prevention or neighborhood crime watches.

One of the most effective crime prevention measures in rural areas is the establishment of a neighborhood organization to maintain surveillance of local properties, roads and highways. The mere existence of such a group serves as a deterrent to thieves and burglars. However, once it has been put to use and found to be effective, it becomes an even more powerful weapon against crime.

Other measures a neighborhood organization can take are immediately reporting to law enforcement officials suspicious persons, acts and the location of questionable vehicles with license numbers. Also, mark (in a recommended manner) personal properties most likely to be taken by thieves, so that if stolen — and recovered — it can be identified, returned to the owner and the thief prosecuted and convicted.

Experience has shown that the three steps (organization, reporting and marking of properties) can sharply reduce the amount of criminal activity in rural areas.

It has often been said that nothing is so potent as an aroused citizenry. Even in cities and towns, law enforcement officials cannot be everywhere all the time. So it is "Mr. and Mrs. Average Citizen" who become the additional eyes and ears needed to maintain law and order. When things get out of order, citizen cooperation is an absolute necessity.

Perhaps our collective public attitude toward crimes of burglary and theft is one of the important aspects of the issue. It has been too easy to lean on the insurance companies to take the sting out of losses from theft. We are then prone to excuse the criminal from prosecution, rather than pressing for conviction. In the long run, this costs us more and encourages the thief.

Unfortunately, some mass media adversely influence our unconscious thinking about crime. Clever criminal activity is often glorified in television programs. The intricacies of the almost perfect crime are paraded before the viewing public, creating a sort of admiration for the perpetrator who, time after time, is able to outwit the police. But then after eventual apprehension or capture, the drama is over. The viewers seldom — if ever — see the conviction, the beginning of punishment or any indication of remorse on the part of the criminal. The residual effect on the viewer is that the perpetrator almost got away with it.

However, crime ceases to be entertaining when we ourselves become the victims of burglary or theft. We then realize that we must regard our neighbor's property as inviolate as our own. This is the beginning of that mutual concern that holds the community or neighborhood together.

Organization is the key to effective action. The local residents must band together and take responsibilities not previously being fulfilled.

Beyond the organizational activities, individual households and farmsteads must be given attention to minimize the chances of becoming the targets of thieves and vandals. Such things as night lights, locks and care of equipment and

livestock must all be taken into account. Frequent communication with trusted neighbors is also a good preventative measure.

The following is a list of steps to take to help protect your rural properties. (From the Institute of Public Safety, MU.)

Security steps for rural residents

Animals

- Avoid penning or enclosing animals for long periods of time.
- Remove loading chutes from accessible loading sites.
- Periodically check fences to make sure they have not been cut or rewired.
- Report strange vehicles and strangers on your land.
- Avoid head counting animals at routine times.
- Brand animals, if possible.
- Maintain a record of any animal scars and deformities, peculiarities, marks and characteristics for identification purposes.
- Immediately report animal losses to the sheriff.
- Avoid accepting checks from strangers for the sale of animals without verification.

Equipment

- Regularly check field equipment, whether it is in the field or stored in a barn.
- Never leave machinery standing in the field for long periods of time.
- Remove keys from unattended machinery or a motor part.
- Chain unattended machinery to a barrier, tree or pole by passing a log chain through a wheel or around an axle and securing it with a case harden lock.
- When advertising machinery for sale, be alert for thieves who might respond to the ad.

Self-help measures

- Maintain a list of emergency numbers.
- Engrave portable valuables with identification numbers.
- Request identification from salespeople and repair and service personnel who are unfamiliar to you.
- Never provide personal information to unknown callers over a telephone.
- Never provide entrance into your home to strangers.
- Remove family keepsakes and valuables to a home of a friend before vacation trips.
- When leaving home for an extended period of time, let a friend know how long you will be gone and where you can be reached in an emergency. Do not publicize your trip.
- Keep non-replaceable valuables in a safe-deposit box.
- Avoid putting your name and address on your key ring.

Outbuildings

- Close and lock all doors on outbuildings.
- Light outbuildings at night, if possible.

Home

- Use dead-bolt locks on all entrance doors.
- Provide good lighting around your home.
- Trim or cut shrubbery from around windows and doors.
- Make your home look occupied by cutting the grass, raking the leaves, shoveling snow from driveway and picking up newspapers and mail.
- If more than one car is driven in the family, park the undriven vehicle in the drive during the day or night.
- Use timers for lights and radios.

For further information on this subject, contact The Law Enforcement Training Institute, 321 Hearn Center, MU, Columbia, Mo. 65211; or phone 573-882-6021.

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