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*Promoting a culture of civic engagement by connecting and supporting all Portlanders working together and with government to build inclusive, safe and livable neighborhoods and communities.*

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# Business Watch

## A guide for crime prevention practitioners and volunteers

Office of Neighborhood Involvement Crime Prevention Program  
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### This manual has the following purposes:

- To support the initial training of newly-forming Business Watches
- To help train new members joining an already established Business Watch
- To consult when questions arise about the procedures and policies of a Business Watch



### Table of Contents

Introduction to Business Watch .....	3
Starting a Business Watch .....	6
Business Watch Tools and Procedures .....	8
Calling Emergency and Non-Emergency Numbers.....	11
Reporting Suspicious Activity .....	13
Addenda .....	17



# Introduction to Business Watch

## Purpose of Business Watch

Business Watch is a program designed to increase commercial viability and residential livability by reducing crime and the fear of crime and promoting positive communication and relationships within an area. The program partners with businesses to maintain a safe and crime-free atmosphere by using communication and crime prevention tools.

The Business Watch program treats businesses in a specific geographic area as a small city or neighborhood. As in any neighborhood, residential or commercial, it is important for “neighbors” to know each other, have mechanisms for sharing information, and understand basic crime prevention and reporting techniques. This is accomplished by creating communication networks and improving observation and crime reporting skills.



## By organizing a Business Watch you will:

1. Become familiar with neighboring businesses, local residents, and activity in your area.
2. Learn how to recognize and report crime and suspicious activity. Discover who to call to get an appropriate response.
3. Communicate regularly with nearby businesses and neighbors using your Communication Network or other Business Watch tools.
4. Develop a positive, open relationship between the Portland Police Bureau, Crime Prevention, and your business.
5. Problem solve with watch members, the police, and crime prevention coordinator where chronic problems exist.
6. Increase employee and customer safety.
7. Create an environment that discourages graffiti, vandalism, litter and crime.
8. Promote safety by reporting all crime and suspicious activity.
9. Learn ways to increase your business security and steps to prevent shoplifting, burglary, robbery, and violence in the workplace.

## Types of Business Watches

A Business Watch is a form of Neighborhood Watch, and is often formed when a problem in the area is noticed, such as a series of shoplifting incidents or vandalism. Some watches continue indefinitely, and some become somewhat dormant once the neighborhood problem is solved. The most effective Business Watches are those that are sustained over time, where group members are motivated to continue because they know it can prevent future crimes by using the communication network developed at the start of the watch.

The Business Watch program can be applied to a number of different environments, such as business districts, large buildings, and/or business campuses. Organization and operation of the watch will vary depending on the crime and livability issues that may be present and the agencies that might respond to these problems. The following are different kinds of Business Watches:

- **Neighborhood Business Watch:** A group of businesses in close geographic proximity that work together to observe and report crime, and communicate with each other, police, and crime prevention.
- **Building Watch:** A program is designed to increase security in commercial buildings and to foster a safer, crime-free atmosphere for the tenants of office buildings and their employees.
- **Campus Watch:** A watch group designed for businesses with multiple buildings and/or multiple locations.

## Roles within a Business Watch



### Organizer

The organizer is someone selected by the group to maintain the paperwork of the group and be the primary communication link with partners of the watch.

### Partners

While community members are the people who form the actual watch, they partner with others to achieve the best results. Without exception, Business Watches partner with, and receive technical assistance from, crime prevention staff and police. Depending on the location of the watch and the specific issues in that area, other partners may also be appropriate.

### Crime Prevention Program Coordinators

Employed by the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, Crime Prevention Program Coordinators (CPPC) are professional problem-solvers, educators, and community organizers on issues of crime and public safety. Every neighborhood in Portland has an assigned CPPC. In the context of Business Watch, CPPCs provide:

- The initial training to watch members, as well as follow-up training, if needed.
- Advice and assistance to the watch, such as information about resources and current crime patterns.

- Coordination of responses to chronic problems. CPPCs send out crime alerts to watches when appropriate, and often act as liaisons between watches, police and other public safety and livability resources.

### **Police Officers**

These could be district officers, who respond to radio calls; Neighborhood Response Team officers, who work on long-term problems; or members of specialty units such as the Gang Enforcement Team, the Drugs and Vice Division, or the School Police. Police receive, review, and respond to incidents reported by the Business Watch, as necessary. Sometimes an officer is assigned to attend watch trainings or meetings.

### **Business District Associations**

A Business District Association is an autonomous nonprofit organization with membership guidelines in its bylaws formed by people in business within a defined geographic boundary for the purpose of promoting the general well-being of their business community. Individuals who are interested in starting a Business Watch may find it helpful to announce their intentions of forming a Business Watch at a Business District Association meeting. Businesses can be involved in a Business Watch without participating in a Business District Association, and visa versa.

### **Residential Neighbors**

Nearby or adjacent neighbors can be important partners in observing activity around a business. In some areas, it can be just as important to work with surrounding residential neighbors as with the other businesses.

### **School staff**

When a Business Watch borders on a school, the group would communicate with that school's principal or administrators, the school district security manager, and/or maintenance and custodial staff to help address problems that are detected on school grounds.

### **Other potential partners**

There are many other city staff and community members that might work with a Business Watch, such as the City's graffiti abatement coordinator, noise control officer, the Office of Transportation, neighborhood nuisance inspectors, or a faith based organization or church in the watch area.

### **Success story**

Business Watches are successful because they bring people together. One of Portland's Business Watches formed as a result of numerous burglaries in one area of Portland. A small group of business owners started meeting with Police and Crime Prevention and soon had an email network of over 100 businesses and property owners. This group was proactive in notifying each other of suspicious activity and took ownership of their prevention activities. In addition, this group worked with Police and Crime Prevention on car prowl prevention, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessments, and many other activities.



# Starting a Business Watch

Business Watches begin with an initial meeting where the Crime Prevention Program Coordinator (CPPC) provides the training and materials you need to get started. Below are the steps for setting up the initial meeting.



## Initial Steps to Organizing

### 1. Talk to your CPPC

Contact the CPPC for your area to tell him or her that you are interested in starting a Business Watch. Ask any questions you have about how to proceed.

### 2. Find out about neighboring businesses' concerns

Talk with your neighbors, ask them about their public safety concerns and about any other block issues they may have. They may provide you with information about suspicious activity in your area at this time. Inquire about their interest in forming a Business Watch.

### 3. Decide what area you are going to organize

You'll want to invite nearby businesses, and in some cases, residents. For a standard city block this could include both sides of the street and property sharing an alley. Although full block participation is ideal, not everyone will make that commitment or choose to participate. This will not preclude you from organizing a Business Watch.

### 4. Decide the time, date, and location of the first meeting

Work with your CPPC and interested businesses to schedule your first meeting/training. Usually, Business Watch trainings are held on weekdays. Often meetings are held at one of the businesses. Choose a meeting space that can comfortably accommodate everyone invited. Allow enough time to accommodate varying schedules; two or three week notice should be sufficient.

### 5. Deliver invitations

Use written invitations to invite neighboring businesses. Try to make personal contact at each location. This will increase meeting turnout. CPPCs can provide you with generic invitations. It's always a good idea to confirm and remind invitees a few days prior to the meeting/training.

## Outline of the Business Watch training

At the training, your CPPC will provide information, assistance, and materials needed to start your group. Talk with your CPPC regarding your group's specific concerns and needs. Expect the following topics at the first meeting:

- Learn the purpose of Business Watch and roles within the watch
- Get acquainted with other commercial neighbors
- Discuss any crime issues of particular interest to the group
- Develop a block map and communication network
- Learn how to recognize and report crime and suspicious activity including resource numbers
- Promote a positive relationship with the Portland Police Bureau
- Create an environment that discourages litter, vandalism and graffiti
- Discover ways to increase business security
- Select a watch organizer(s)
- Decide whether or not to purchase Business Watch signs
- Q & A

## After the first meeting

After the initial meeting, there are a few tasks that need to be completed by the Business Watch organizer and members to get the Watch officially up and running. Tasks include:

- Copy and distribute communication network questionnaires
- Plan a follow-up meeting
- Determine next steps

## Follow up training and meetings

An active Business Watch often has members join after the initial training. The CPPC will support the efforts of the growing Watch, including problem-solving and resource materials.

It is a good idea for active Business Watches to meet periodically. At a minimum, the group should meet annually. Many groups find it effective to meet more often. The CPPC or a police officer will be able to attend some of these meetings. Meetings are a good time to discuss member recruitment and or any procedural changes or decisions.



# Business Watch Tools and Procedures

One of the most effective and valuable features of Business Watch is getting to know your neighbors. It is important for Business Watch participants to provide and distribute contact information. It is also helpful to share information about your business, such as hours of operation, normal activities, type of business, etc.



The more information you share with each other, the better able you are to recognize when something suspicious is occurring. Many burglars “case” a business before committing a crime, paying attention to schedules, activities and the vigilance of neighbors. If a burglar strives to become familiar with patterns in your area, shouldn't you become familiar with them as well?

Below are tools for sharing information.

## Block Profile Questionnaire

Where to find it: In the addenda section of this handout.

What it is: The profile questionnaire is used to collect participant information along with more detailed information such as: type of business, hours of operation, emergency phone numbers, email addresses, etc. Although there are specific reasons for sharing each piece of information on the questionnaire, watch members might not feel comfortable answering all of the questions on the form. This is voluntary. The form does not have to be filled out completely, but at the very minimum participants do need to share names, addresses, phone numbers and/or email addresses.

How to use it: The form is completed at the time of the initial Business Watch meeting/training. The watch organizer will compile the questionnaires and distribute them to the watch members.

## Block Map

Where to find it: The Block Map is created using information from the completed profile questionnaires, then copies are distributed to all watch members. Sample block maps can be found in the addenda section of this handout.

What it is: The block map gives you a visual picture of your block. It is a handy way to remember addresses and names and it makes it easy to report any activity to a 9-1-1 operator, so that help can respond as quickly as possible.

How to use it: Keep it with your Block Profile Questionnaires in an accessible and secure location preferably by the phone. If you should need to call 9-1-1, take it out and use it to help describe where a problem is happening while you talk to the 9-1-1 call taker.

## Communication Network

Where to find it: The Communication Network is created from the completed business watch profile questionnaires. Copies are distributed to all watch members. A sample profile is shown at the end of this manual, along with instructions on how to use the Communication Network.

What it is: The Communication Network gives block members an effective method for sharing information between each other quickly. Each business is responsible for initiating the Communication Network when any problems arise.

How to use it: Keep it with your Block Map and Block Profile Questionnaires in an accessible but secure place in your business. Anytime there is news that should be shared with everyone right away, the Communication Network should be activated. For example, if you catch someone trying to shoplift in your business and tell them to leave, report it to the police and then activate the Communication Network so everyone on your street finds out about the problem.



Here is a more detailed explanation of the roles within a Business Watch:

### **Business Watch organizer tasks**

- Design a Block Map, Communication Network and Block Profile Questionnaires to distribute. Keep them up to date and inform your CPPC of any changes.
- Relay information about crime and nuisance activity on the block to the appropriate resource (CPPC, Police Bureau, etc.).
- Act as the primary contact person between the CPPC or the police and the block.
- Coordinate problem solving efforts, scheduling meetings and social gatherings.
- Find a replacement, if you are no longer able to fulfill the duties of Business Watch organizer.
- Perform the regular duties of a watch member as described below.

### **Business Watch member tasks**

- Report all crime and suspicious activity.
- Participate in the communication network, pass on messages as part of the communication network, and inform neighboring businesses of crimes and suspicious activity.
- Log details about suspicious or criminal activity to help police and crime prevention respond most effectively.
- Attend Business Watch meetings and social gatherings, if possible.
- Work with the CPPC, police, and other resources to resolve neighborhood concerns.
- Implement personal safety and commercial security tactics to make the block less attractive to criminals.
- Work to find options and solutions to neighborhood issues and finds ways that members can be involved in the problem solving process.

# Calling Emergency and Non-Emergency Numbers

It is important to know how to identify and report crimes and suspicious activity. Here are some tips for deciding whether an incident is an emergency (9-1-1) or a non-emergency (503-823-3333) call.

## Police, Fire, or Medical emergencies: 9-1-1

Call 9-1-1 when a:

- Crime is in progress
- Situation is about to escalate into an emergency (endangering life or major property)
- Crime just occurred (especially if you can describe the suspect and the direction in which s/he fled).

In cases of serious injury or life threatening situations, always call emergency 9-1-1 first, then immediately contact security (if relevant) and let them know your situation and that you've called 9-1-1.

## What happens when you call 9-1-1

When you call 9-1-1, a call taker will ask you a series of questions that they are trained to ask. Keep your answers as short and direct as possible. Questions may include: What happened? What is the location? Where are you calling from? What is your name?

Please do not assume that the call taker has this information in the computer. All facts need to be verified to ensure that your emergency is handled as quickly as possible.

## Why you should stay on the line

While you are on the phone with the call taker, he or she can send your call to the dispatcher. Staying on the line with the call taker does not interfere with the ability of the dispatcher to send help, and it will not delay the response. The call taker may need you to stay on the line to help direct emergency personnel to the right location or to provide additional assistance that can help ensure your emergency is handled correctly. If it is possible, do not hang up the phone until the 9-1-1 call taker says it is okay to hang up.

## What should you do if you're put on hold?

If you call 9-1-1 and reach a recording that states all lines are busy, stay on the line. Your call will be answered as quickly as possible. If you hang up and redial, you will lose your place in line and a call taker will receive the message that someone from your phone called 9-1-1 and then hung up. The call taker then is required to attempt to call you back; meanwhile if you are calling in to 9-1-1 again, two call takers are now attempting to respond to your call.

## **Non-emergency: 503-823-3333**

The non-emergency number is 503-823-3333, which operates 24 hours a day for non-emergency police help. Using the non-emergency number keeps 9-1-1 available for true emergencies. When dialing the non-emergency number, you will go into a voicemail system. By selecting the correct options you will be able to speak to an operator. Some examples of times when you should call 823-3333 are:

- Your business was burglarized last night.
- Your vehicle was broken into last night.
- Your property was vandalized or graffitied last night.
- You need to add additional information to a report you made last week.
- Your business received a bad check several days ago.

## **When to call other resource numbers**

Some people call 9-1-1 or the non-emergency number inappropriately to ask about road conditions, report an animal problem that does not involve a vicious animal, report a power outage, or are having trouble finding a phone number in the phone book. When you need information, or if you are making routine business inquiries, you should not use either the emergency or non-emergency number. Below are some general inquiry numbers.

- 4-1-1 Information: To find a phone number in the phone book.
- 503-823-4000 City/County information and referral: For a complaint or question regarding a service provided by the City of Portland or Multnomah County.
- 503-823-4636 Portland Police Bureau information line: For general questions regarding police services or if you are unsure who to call with your non-emergency question.
- For other frequently called numbers, ask your CPPC for a problem solving resources contact list.



*Photo Courtesy of the Bureau of Emergency Communications*

# Reporting suspicious activity

## What to look for

Some suspicious activity may not be obvious. What is considered suspicious activity in one building may be common in another. Become familiar with your neighbors, so you can evaluate whether or not activity is suspicious. Keep in mind that behavior or activity that is not normal for your area could be an indication that a crime is about to happen. Watches can help businesses identify legitimate clients, in addition to spotting fraud and suspicious persons.

Watch for people:

- Wandering around aimlessly, trying to open closed doors.
- Loitering in restrooms.
- Selling or pretending to sell something.
- Wandering around the common areas of your floor. They could be a client of another tenant, but they could also be someone “casing” the floor for hiding places or under-monitored offices.
- Soliciting in your area. If you are really suspicious of someone who is soliciting, ask for the salesperson’s supervisor’s phone number and call to ask that the employee be verified and/or told to leave the building.
- Persons offering items for sale at a very low price, often in parking lots. They could be selling stolen or counterfeit merchandise.

If your intuition tells you something is not right, call 9-1-1 or the non-emergency number and report your suspicions. It is better to discover that nothing is wrong than to let a crime occur. If there is an ongoing problem with crime at a particular location, your CPPC will give you forms to help you log the suspicious activity. Logging helps establish patterns in the activity which makes effective response easier, and can help police get search warrants for locations with serious problems.

Another reason to report crime and suspicious activity is that “information is power.” By sharing your experience with other businesses, you empower yourself and others to work together to solve common concerns and problems. If you are a tenant, remember to let your building manager know whenever you have called 9-1-1 or the non-emergency number to make a report.

## Describing suspects, vehicles, and activities

When you call the police or make entries into a log, how you describe what you have seen matters. Your information will allow any responding officer(s) to know specifically what they are looking for and where to look for it. Even if the police are not called, it is often helpful to record information that can be used or needed at a later date.

### **Describing suspects**

Take note of sex, race, age, height, weight, hair, complexion, scars, tattoos, glasses, facial hair, clothing, and anything else that would help police find the person. If you do not have time to note all of these, pay the most attention to things the suspect cannot easily change like scars, marks, tattoos, or weight.

### **Describing activities**

Give as much detail as you possibly can. For example:

"I saw a person take a small orange colored object out of their mouth and hand it to another person. The second person handed the first person money. The first person folded the money in half and put the money in the right front pocket of their pants. The second person put the orange packet in the left front pocket of their jacket," is much more useful than: "I saw a person dealing drugs."



<b><i>Concerning Vehicles</i></b>	<b><i>Possible Activity</i></b>
Slow moving vehicle without lights	Possibly casing neighborhood
Vehicle being loaded with valuables if parked by closed business or residence	Possible burglary in progress
Person detaching mechanical parts or accessories from vehicle	Possible theft or vandalism in progress
Locked vehicle that someone is attempting to forcibly enter	Possible theft of car or contents in progress
Someone being forced into vehicle	Possible kidnap, assault, attempted sexual assault, domestic violence

<b><i>Concerning Persons</i></b>	<b><i>Possible Activity</i></b>
Going door to door, especially if one or more persons goes to the rear of the house	Casing, possible burglary in progress
Loitering in front of house or business, especially if site is unoccupied	Possible burglary suspects
Person running carrying items of value, i.e. TV, stereo	Possible suspect fleeing scene of theft
Sounds of a fight- screaming or yelling, sounds of breaking furniture or glass	Possible domestic violence assault, sexual assault
Persons offering items for sale at a very low price	Possibly trying to sell stolen items
Persons coming to your door with unusual requests, especially if yours is the only house approached	Possibly casing house or attempting an entry for robbery

### **Describing vehicles**

The license plate is the most important piece of information. Take note of the license plate and the direction in which the vehicle was traveling. Then, note color, make, year, body style, and any other identifying characteristics such as dents or bumperstickers.

### **Accurate Terminology**

When calling 9-1-1 it is important to be as clear and accurate as possible about what you are observing. In order to be effective you should have working knowledge of the terminology used by the police and the 9-1-1 call takers to prioritize crime. To say “I’ve been robbed!” when in fact you were the victim of a burglary may have an effect on how your situation is responded to. Below is a list of commonly used terms to describe criminal activity.



<b><i>Crime</i></b>	<b><i>Definition</i></b>
Assault	Causing injury or attempting to cause injury to another person
Burglary	Unlawful entry of a structure with intent to commit a felony or any theft. (Note: a residential burglary is theft from a dwelling. Non-residential burglary is theft from a business, a detached garage or any other non-dwelling.)
Car Prowl	Theft from an automobile, not the theft of an automobile
Larceny	Theft of property other than by burglary or robbery (pickpocketing, shoplifting, etc.)
Robbery	Taking or carrying away of another’s property forcefully or with imminent threat of force with intent of permanently depriving rightful owner of the property (e.g.. a stick-up, mugging)
Sexual Assault	Forced or unconsented to sexual activity by one against another (not limited to rape or to women)
Vandalism	Destruction or defacing of property

### **Reporting – Why it’s important**

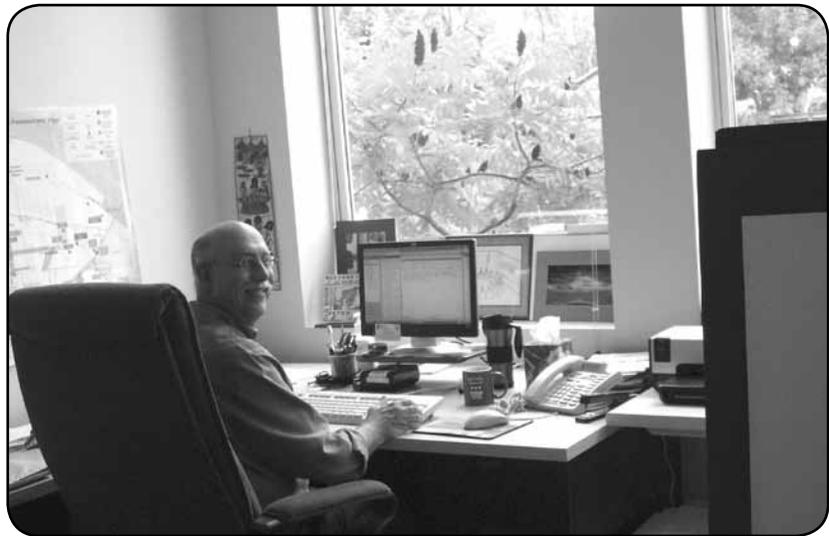
In general, if you do not report all crimes, no matter how minor, law enforcement agencies will not know that problems exist in your area. In order to gather information, track trends and catch perpetrators, law enforcement agencies need the community’s help.

The City of Portland uses several factors in allocating police officers to various parts of the city. One very important set of data the Police Bureau uses to assign personnel is reported crimes and suspicious activities, or the number of “calls for service” citizens’ make to 9-1-1 and 503-823-3333.

### **Community Coordination and Communication**

Using your communication network, letting other nearby business and/or the building management/security know about your suspicions is a key component of the Business Watch program. Sharing information helps others know what may be occurring and gives them the opportunity to take action and helps keep others from becoming the next victim. Crimes can be solved and deterred when people share information.

Business Watch participants who use email, telephone, or fax communication networks can be actively involved in preventing crime in their area. These networks allow police and security providers in a number of industries to share information quickly. These networks are successful in tracking and stopping trends in crime.





# Addenda

## Block Profile Questionnaire

This information is used by the Business Watch organizer to create the Block Map and Communication Network. Please complete this form and return it to the organizer before you leave the meeting. The \* denotes required information for watch participation. All additional information is voluntary, but the more information you provide, the better able neighboring businesses will be in identifying suspicious activity around your business. Thank you!

\*Occupant/Firm name: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Business: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Business Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Building Description: \_\_\_\_\_

### Contact Information

\*Business Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Emergency After Hours Contact (name, position, and phone numbers) \_\_\_\_\_

### Business Information

Regular Business Hours: \_\_\_\_\_

Is the building occupied during non-business hours? (circle one) yes / no    If yes, please explain:

Alarm: (circle one) yes / no

If yes, should your neighbors call 9-1-1 when they hear your alarm? (circle one) yes / no

Additional Information:

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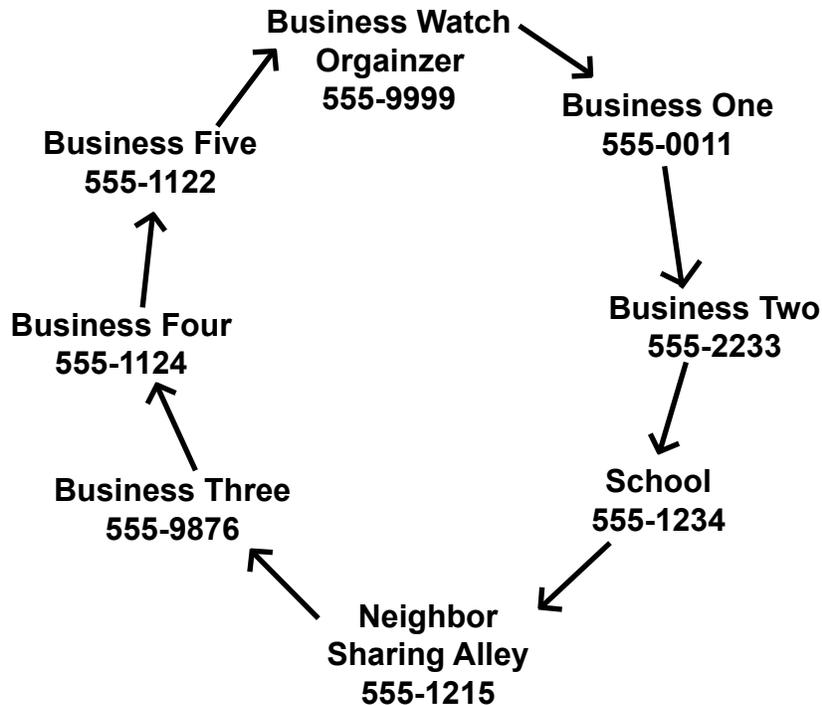
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# Communication Network

Below is a typical Business Watch Communication Network

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## How to use the telephone tree

1. If you see suspicious or criminal activity, first notify the police at 9-1-1 or the non-emergency number, 503-823-3333. Then activate the communication network as described below in order to share information about the problem.
2. Contact the person in the position after yours in the communication network to tell them about the problem.
  - a. If you talk to them directly, tell them what the problem is, and ask them to continue by contacting the person after them.
  - b. If the person you contact is not home, leave a message, then contact the next person in line. Continue the contacts until you have reached a live person who can continue contacting the next person.
3. You will know the communication network has been successfully completed when you are contacted at the end.

Note: Email is also a good way to share information. Remember that some people do not check their emails regularly, so keep this in mind if you are trying to get important, time sensitive information distributed.

You can also activate the communication network for other purposes, such as to give updates about a crime or suspicious event that already happened for the purpose of rumor control. The Business Watch organizer will initiate practice runs periodically to ensure the phone tree is working properly.

# Sample Block Maps

Below are several samples of block maps. When you make your block map, be sure to include (1) business addresses, even if the residents are not participating or is vacant; (2) business color; (3) name(s) of occupant(s); (4) phone number; (5) street names; (6) any residential buildings on your block, such as homes or apartments; and (7) a directional compass. Note the symbols after some members' names.

