



To organize and support community partnerships to prevent crime and the fear of crime

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This document is available at the Crime Prevention Program website:

www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/cp



Reporting Suspicious & Criminal Activity

Office of Neighborhood Involvement Crime Prevention Program
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Suspicious activity is any **behavior** that causes alarm. *Behavior* is what makes someone's activities suspicious, **not** their appearance, race, ethnicity, religion or national origin. Details such as race and appearance will be important to relay to the police to describe the person(s) involved in suspicious activity, but shouldn't be used as the basis of determining whether something is suspicious. We encourage residents to have a healthy vigilance over their environment by being aware of what is going on around them and responding to those cues that indicate a problem or the potential for one. If individuals' responses are rooted in bias, they will inaccurately assess what is a threat, ignore other cues in their environment that may actually indicate a problem and could harm the individuals they are profiling. Do your best to know your biases and focus on behavior. It will allow your intuition to kick in when you need it most.

When you know your neighbors, you become aware of who lives in the houses or apartment units near you, the cars and bikes they drive, pedestrians and the routines of the neighborhood. Because of your familiarity, you can more readily identify suspicious activity, report it to the police and let your neighbors know what occurred. A Neighborhood Watch can help you become acquainted with your neighbors and establish lines of communication.

The following are examples of neighbors responding to suspicious activity.

- At 3:00 a.m. a woman saw a car pull up at an elderly neighbor's home. One man left the car and disappeared around the corner while a second man stayed behind the wheel with the lights off and the car's engine running. The woman called 9-1-1 and the police caught the first man breaking into a gas station on the next block.
- Early one Sunday morning, a neighbor noticed a man walking down the street looking into vehicles and then heard glass breaking seconds later. The neighbor called 9-1-1 and the police arrested the man who was in possession of several stolen car stereos a few blocks away.
- A woman saw a young man knock on her neighbor's front door. When nobody answered, he walked around the side of the house. She immediately called 9-1-1 and the man was arrested for burglary.

What to look for

Some suspicious activity may not be as obvious as the previous examples. Additionally, what is considered suspicious on one block may be normal occurrence on another. When the activity that you are seeing is unusual for your street, call the police. Other examples of suspicious activity include:

Suspicious Activity	What may be going on
Slow moving vehicle without lights	Possibly casing the neighborhood
Person detaching mechanical parts or accessories from vehicle	Possible theft or vandalism in progress

**City of Portland's
Crime Prevention
Program**

Our program provides prevention advice, organizes and trains Portland residents and businesses on crime issues. To connect with a Crime Prevention Program Coordinator in your Portland neighborhood:

- Call 503-823-4064
- Email onicpa@portlandoregon.gov

Request a training at www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/70447.

Suspicious Activity	What may be going on
Person loading valuables into a vehicle that is parked by closed business or unoccupied residence	Possible burglary in progress
Someone attempting to forcibly enter a locked vehicle	Possible car prowling or theft in progress
Person being forced into vehicle	Possible kidnap, assault, attempted sexual assault, domestic violence
Loitering in front of house or business, especially at an unoccupied site	Possible burglary
Person running away with items of value, i.e. TV, stereo	Possible suspect fleeing the scene of a theft
Sounds of a fight—screaming, yelling, sounds of furniture or glass breaking	Possible domestic violence assault, sexual assault
Persons offering items for sale well below market price	Possibly trying to sell stolen items
Persons coming to your door with unusual requests, such as money for gas or a locksmith, or asking for donations for a charity without proper identification and materials	Possible scam or casing house or attempting an entry for robbery

Calling the police

If your intuition tells you something isn't right about the activity you are observing, call 9-1-1 or the police non-emergency number (503-823-3333). It's better to discover that nothing is wrong than to let a crime occur.

When to call 911

Call 911 when there is an immediate threat to life or property or a crime in progress. When calling 9-1-1 on a cell phone in Multnomah County, you will be prompted to press a key or say "911" after hearing a brief recorded message. If you do not respond after nine seconds, the call ends. This extra step is necessary because there are a lot of unintentional calls due to pocket dialing. It is always preferred that you call 9-1-1 to ask for emergency response. However, people who would be put in greater danger by talking on the phone or people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have limited speaking capabilities can text to 9-1-1.

What happens when you call 911

When you call 911, a call taker will ask you a series of questions such as:

- Where is the emergency? (provide address, landmarks, street names)
- What is happening? Describe the suspects, vehicles and activities that you are seeing. Let them know if any suspects are still around. If not, when were they last seen and what direction were they headed?
- What is your name and number you are calling from? Please do not assume that the call taker has your contact info in the computer.

Let the call taker ask the questions in the order that is necessary. Keep your answers as concise and accurate as possible. 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 sends your

information to the dispatcher, who relays information directly to the police. Staying on the phone and answering questions with the call taker does not delay police response. The process allows the police to receive the necessary information to ensure a safe and effective response. If possible, do not hang up the phone until the call taker instructs you to do so.

What should you do if the phone lines are busy?

If you call 911 and reach a recording which states that 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.

When to call the non-emergency number

In Portland, you can contact 503-823-3333 for non-emergency police assistance. Use the non-emergency line for suspicious activities that are not an immediate threat to life or property or to report a crime that has already occurred and the suspect is gone. The same call takers who answer 9-1-1 field calls for this phone line. Using the non-emergency number keeps 9-1-1 phone lines available for true emergencies. Depending on the call load for both numbers, your call may be picked up immediately or you may need to wait for the next available call taker. When you don't know whether to call 9-1-1 or the non-emergency number, start with 9-1-1. In some cases, the call takers may instruct you to hang up and call the non-emergency number.

Some examples of when you should call 503-823-3333 are:

- When you look out your front window, you see a person looking into the windows of cars parked on the street.
- You return home after work and find that someone has stolen your lawn mower out of your shed at some point during the day. For certain crimes, such as theft from a publicly accessible space, you can file online at www.portlandoregon.gov/police/cor.

When not to call either number

Often people call 911 or the non-emergency number if they want to know road conditions, report an animal problem which does not involve a vicious animal, report a power outage, or are having trouble finding a phone number. For these requests or other routine business inquiries, you should not use either the emergency or non-emergency number. If you have a complaint or question regarding a service provided by the City of Portland or Multnomah County, call the City/County Information and Referral Line at 503-823-4000.

If there is an ongoing problem with crime at a location in Portland, keep notes of the activities, dates, times and the officers and other agency representatives you have spoken to. You can also contact your Crime Prevention Program Coordinator for advice about what to do next.

Use Accurate Terminology

When calling 9-1-1, use accurate terminology when describing your observations. To say "I've been robbed!" when you were the victim of a burglary may affect how the police respond. See definitions to the right.

Describing suspect, vehicles, and activities

When you call for police assistance, how you describe what you have seen allows a responding officer(s) to know specifically what they are looking for and where to look for it. Describe one suspect at a time from head to toe. The charts on the following page provides examples of features to notice.

Terminology: Criminal Activity
Assault: Causing injury or attempting to cause injury to another person
Burglary: Unlawfully entering a home, business or other structure with intent to commit a theft or other crime
Robbery: Taking another's property by force, threat of force or putting the victim in fear of immediate harm e.g. a stick-up, mugging
Car Prowl (theft from a vehicle): Stealing the contents or car parts from an automobile—not the theft of an automobile
Larceny (another term used for Theft): Stealing property other than by burglary or robbery e.g. pickpocketing, shoplifting, bike theft, car prowl
Sexual Assault: Forced or nonconsensual sexual activity by one against another (not limited to rape or to women)
Vandalism: Destruction or defacing of property
Trespassing: Entering or remaining on a premises without the owner's permission
Casing: To examine or survey an area in order to plan out a crime

Suspect Identification Chart

Age, gender, race, weight & height

Eye color

Glasses color and style

Beard, moustache, sideburns, goatee

shirt, tie-color and type

Jewelry-watches, rings, necklaces, earrings, belts

Hair color, length, style

Hat color and type

Skin-color, scars, tattoos, birthmarks, moles, piercings

Weapon type

Jacket, coat, vest, sweatshirt

Any bags, backpacks, purses?

Pants, skirt, shorts

Shoes-color, size, type. Gait-manner of walking

What is unique about this individual?
 The best identifiers are the ones that are unique to the suspect and can't easily be changed such as scars, tattoos and facial features.

Notes

Vehicle Identification Chart

Is the suspect walking or driving a car, motorcycle, bicycle? Take note of:

Body Style i.e. Sedan, Hatchback, SUV

Color of car

Make, model and year of the car

*License Plate # and state

Unique characteristics such as a bumperstickers, hubcaps or damage, different colors on the car

Direction the car is headed and last seen

Notes

* License plate information is one of the most helpful details to remember.