

October 16, 2006

Dear Fontana Residents:

I am sorry I was not able to attend your most recent meeting that kicked off your Neighborhood Watch Program (NHW) but I commend you all for taking a very wise and proactive step in protecting yourselves, family and property. One of my primary responsibilities is establishing or reactivating NHW's as well as educating members on crime prevention and effective communication between each other and us here at Albemarle County Police Department. In light of the e-mails I recently received regarding the solicitors, I wanted to take a few minutes to talk about crime prevention and communication.

As a NHW, your number one responsibility is to report:

Suspicious Activity: ANYthing that seems even slightly out of the ordinary, *even if it doesn't make you feel threatened*. I use the very recent story of a neighbor spotting a disheveled man, who she did not recognize, walking down the street. She thought he looked a little odd, but oh well. Because she ignored the fact that someone seemed out of place in a neighborhood she was familiar with, a little girl's life will never be the same. It was not the neighbor's fault that this crime occurred but I know she feels very bad that there was a chance could have prevented this. The first thing she said was that she didn't feel threatened because she was secure in her home and that she didn't want to bother the police.

Any crime that *may* have taken place: If you go in your home and notice your change jar gone, don't assume that you've lost your mind and misplaced it. **Call 911** and let us decide. Criminals take and do very strange things sometimes

Any crime that *has* taken place: You would be surprised the number of crimes that go unreported. The usual reason for this is again, victims don't want to bother us and often they feel responsible and/or the items taken were not of significant value. Yes, you should have locked the door, and yes, you may only be out of a pack of cigarettes, but this person may have committed a more serious crime and your home/car has the finger print we desperately need to solve the case.

To Report: call 911 FIRST, then person above and below you on the phone tree. Depending on the urgency, e-mail can be used as well. The coordinator should notify me as soon after he/she is notified.

Learning to be comfortable dialing 911 is very important. 911 goes to the same place, and is answered by the same people, as the non-emergency number. The only difference, is in the event there is a natural disaster, for example, and call volume is very high, dispatchers have the option of putting the non-emergency line on hold. Dialing 911 is simply a way to get a message from the 911 dispatcher to the officer(s) working in your sector. The dispatcher and officer work together to prioritize calls. They will not come out immediately for most non-emergency calls. In fact, depending on staffing, which is currently very low, the caller may just get a phone call from the officer asking for details so he can follow-up on it at a later time. When you call 911, you create a record of activity, alert the officers, and help alert to a pattern if one develops. Also note that if you would like an officer to follow-up with, you must state that at the time of your call. Feel free to call me as well and I will help where I can

Basic Crime Prevention Tips

- * if you remove either the OPPORTUNITY, TARGET, or DESIRE – you prevent the crime from happening*
- LOCK LOCK LOCK – car doors, garage doors, windows (upper level as well – I've heard several cases of climbers and those who use ladders posing as repair men), basement doors, sliding glass doors (which are very easy to get into even with charlie bars) and main entry doors- even if you will just be out for a minute.
 - Remove valuables from sight – if you have a purse, money, jewelry, shopping bags near windows, sitting in cars etc., you are creating desire. These are the cases were you will often see windows broken out of locked car doors.
 - Do not make it obvious when you are not home. Have a neighbor pick up your mail and call ACPD and request a vacation check if you will be gone longer than a week. We ask you a few questions about your home and the dates you will be gone. If an officer has any down time during your vacation, he/she will check on your home.
 - DO NOT open your door for anyone unless you know who it is. It is very easy for someone to force there way into your home once that door has been opened.

- Keep your home and the area around your home/car adequately lit. Criminals don't want to be seen. If they could choose to steal a car under a tree or under a street light they will more than likely go for the tree.
- Trust your instincts!