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Neighborhood Watch 2.0

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Are Neighborhood Watches keeping up with our tech-savvy society?

Most Crime Prevention practitioners will tell you that communities are made safer by educating and empowering the citizens who live and work there. In my opinion, Neighborhood Watches are the most effective tool for accomplishing this goal. However, are your community watch groups running as efficiently as possible?

In the last decade, the use of cell phones, e-mail, social media websites, and more recently smart phones, tablets and pads has exploded. All this technology has allowed us to communicate information more quickly and with a larger audience than ever before. A person can send out an electronic message to hundreds of people in the time it would take to place a single phone call.

When an alert Watch member sees a suspicious circumstance, that information can be shared almost instantly with other concerned neighbors via electronic media. Nowadays, cell phones are carried by a large portion of the population and most can capture photographs and video to share with responding police. Forward thinking police departments are setting up social media websites to share information in a timely fashion.

However, alarmist behaviors can also be spread faster than ever with these technologies. Imagine if the boy who cried wolf had his own website. We all have a responsibility to have fact checking mechanisms in place before sharing information.

As information sharing technology matures and its use by our population increases, we owe it to ourselves to look at every emerging trend and ask, "Can we use this to improve our Neighborhood Watches?"