



# Neighbourhood watch in multiple family dwellings



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**Brå – a centre of knowledge on crime and measures to combat crime**

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet – Brå) works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime and crime prevention work and the justice system's responses to crime.

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**Why should a landlord become involved in neighbourhood watch?**

*Crime prevention work produces higher levels of perceived security, which in turn creates attractive residential areas. Reduced crime in the form of graffiti, vandalism and burglaries produces a reduction in costs, freeing up money that we can instead use for measures intended to improve the well-being of our tenants.*

Helene Blomberg, Tenants' manager, Halmstads fastighets AB  
Halmstad

**What advantages do you as a police officer see with the neighbourhood watch method?**

*In my view, the neighbourhood watch work in Varberg has contributed to strengthening the mutual trust and confidence that exists between the residents, landlords and the police. We have reduced the number of crimes and complaints, which has meant that I can now devote more time to visits with the objective of preventing crime.*

Tomas Jansson, Assistant local police chief in Varberg  
Halland Police Authority

**What experiences has the tenants' association gained from the work in Karlskrona?**

*Neighbourhood watch helps to produce a sense of security because people get to know one another. By holding stairwell meetings we have been able to learn about and make use of the residents' interests. It has produced a high level of involvement among the residents.*

Annelie Robertsson, Project leader, Karlskrona  
Swedish Union of Tenants, South-East Region

**Why does the municipality of Hallstahammar work to promote neighbourhood watch?**

*For us it's about participation. By means of neighbourhood watch and well-developed IT-communication we can maintain an active dialogue with those who live in our municipality.*

Christer Hallqvist, Co-ordinator, Local Crime Prevention Council  
Hallstahammar

*This guide is written on the basis of the situation in Sweden. Most of its contents are of a very general nature, however, which means that the guide's recommendations can easily be adapted to suit the needs and conditions of different countries.*

## Neighbourhood watch in multiple family dwellings

*This guide is primarily intended for those who want to know how to initiate and implement neighbourhood watch programmes in multiple family dwellings. We believe that those who read the guide will be people working at the strategic level or who have an overarching responsibility for the development of safety and security in one or more residential areas.*

Perhaps you are active on your municipality's local crime prevention council (or similar), or work within the police, for a landlord, or for a residents' association or insurance company. If you are a private individual who wants to start a neighbourhood watch programme in your apartment building, we recommend that you contact one of the above parties.

The contents of the guide are based on research findings and practical experiences of neighbourhood watch in multiple family dwellings. The guide provides advice and describes how you can systematically build up an organisation and create the conditions for effective, long-term neighbourhood watch work. At the end of the guide, there is a list of places where you can obtain more detailed information and practical tips relating to neighbourhood watch.

The guide has been produced for residential areas that are characterised by high levels of both exposure to crime and perceived insecurity and where the level of commitment to neighbourhood watch among the residents may initially be quite low.

The guide will also be useful for those working in areas characterised by lower levels of insecurity and where there are higher levels of interest and commitment among the residents. In such cases, the organisational solutions proposed in the guide may be adapted to suit the nature of the problems and needs of a specific residential area.

## What is neighbourhood watch?

Neighbourhood watch first and foremost involves neighbours working together to combat crime in their residential area. Traditionally, neighbourhood watch is founded on dialogue and collaboration between residents and the police.

The method has been in use for approximately 40 years. However, there is much to suggest that the neighbourhood watch model may need to be developed further in order to maximise its potential in residential areas dominated by multiple family dwellings. It is for this reason that the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention has taken the decision to publish this guide.

For neighbourhood watch in multiple family dwellings to function effectively over the longer term, it is important that collaborations are extended to include more actors, so that parties such as the landlord, housing associations and others who are active in the area become involved and assume responsibility for the work.

Neighbourhood watch can be implemented in a range of different ways and may include many different activities. The objective is to work together to prevent crime and thereby to create a safe and congenial residential environment. The core work of neighbourhood watch is based on creating a network for those who live and are active in a given neighbourhood. Through this network, people help each other to keep an eye on another's homes, communal spaces and the immediate environment. The collaboration also functions as an informational network by means of which information about suspected crimes and other problems can quickly reach the relevant parties.

Neighbourhood watch becomes an effective means of combating burglary, theft and vandalism primarily as a result of people working to increase the level of supervision of homes and their immediate environment, but also by reducing the opportunities to steal desirable goods.

### **Benefits of neighbourhood watch**

- Reduces crime in the neighbourhood
- Increases levels of participation in the neighbourhood among residents
- May increase levels of perceived safety and well-being among those who live and are active in the neighbourhood
- May increase levels of confidence between residents and other participating actors.

An international research study has shown that neighbourhood watch can reduce levels of crime in a residential neighbourhood by, on average, approximately one-fifth. The crimes in question include, for example, burglaries and other property offences that affect residents.

Neighbourhood watch often increases levels of perceived safety and well-being among residents, both as a result of the reduced risk of exposure to crime and because the method stimulates a sense of community among neighbours and produces improved levels of participation in the neighbourhood.

The international research emphasises that the police in particular may benefit from the improved levels of confidence among citizens that are produced by neighbourhood watch. A well-functioning collaboration increases the chances of the police receiving tips from the public. A number of practical examples from Sweden have also shown that the participation of other parties is also significant from the perspective of producing improved levels of confidence.

## **Planning neighbourhood watch**

### **Involve affected organisations**

Begin by identifying the parties that may be interested in starting and implementing neighbourhood watch in the neighbourhood where you wish to develop the programme. The residents, represented for example by the tenants' association, together with landlords and the police are self-evident parties for inclusion in the neighbourhood watch work. But the municipality, insurance companies and other actors with local ties may also serve as important resources in the work with neighbourhood watch.

As the one taking the initiative for the introduction of neighbourhood watch, you may have to motivate these parties to become involved in the work. Try to find out in advance what benefits neighbourhood watch may produce for the various parties. These may take the form of financial benefits, possibilities to come closer to achieving the goals of the relevant party or attracting new members to the organisation. Improvements to the attractiveness and status of the neighbourhood will be of benefit to many different actors.

### **Make a decision on neighbourhood watch and create an organisation**

For the collaboration to work, the parties should make a formal decision on neighbourhood watch and should also earmark resources (staff, time and money) for the work involved. For neighbourhood watch to function well over time, you will need to formulate a long-term plan and determine a budget for the work involved. In order to ensure continued interest and involvement it is very important that all parties are equally able to have a high level of insight into the work. It is a good idea for the organisations to form a partnership and create an organisation that is led by a responsible steering group, referred to here as a partnership group.

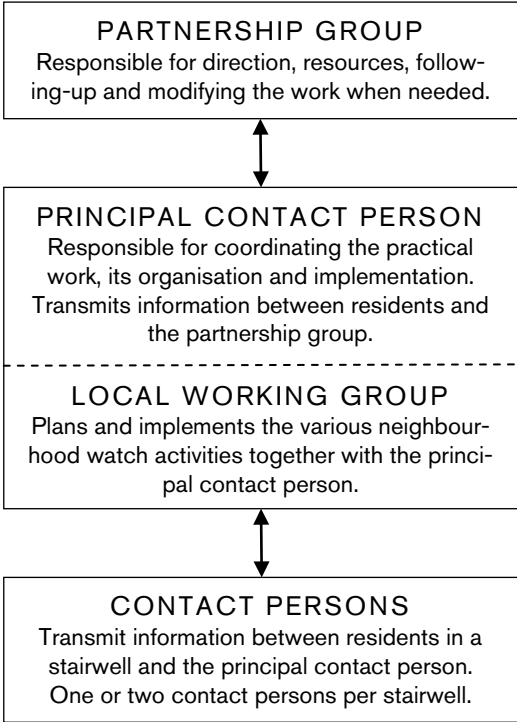
A partnership group can be formed at different levels depending on the size of the municipality, the level of crime or the organisational structure of the parties involved. The work of the group may be located within the framework of a local crime prevention council or some other existing organisation.

The advantage of allowing the partnership group to be a part of the work of the local crime prevention council is that these councils often have a broad overarching knowledge of the situation within the municipality. This makes it easier to prioritise resources and to assign them to where the needs are greatest. This may even be of benefit to the long-term prospects of the neighbourhood watch work. If the work of the partnership group is located at this overarching level, the group is likely to work with the implementation of several local neighbourhood watch programmes each with its own local work group.

In several places in Sweden, the municipality and the police have signed local collaboration agreements on crime prevention work. It may be beneficial to formally include neighbourhood watch activities as part of this work.

**Suggested organisation**

The proposed organisation has been formulated to function in neighbourhoods with the highest levels of crime and perceived insecurity. For those working in calmer and more secure areas, consideration should be given to adapting the nature and size of the organisation to the needs of the specific neighbourhood.



**The partnership group**

The partnership group is comprised of people at the commissioning level who are able to assume the overall, long-term responsibility for the neighbourhood watch work. The task of the group is to ensure that the neighbourhood watch programme is given the time-related, staffing and financial resources required. It is important that one of the parties is responsible for calling meetings and also has the primary responsibility for the neighbourhood watch work. The partnership group should meet a few times per year.



The group should be made up of people who represent the landlord, tenant-owners' association or tenants' association and people with responsibility for crime prevention work within the police, the municipality and possibly also an insurance company. There may also be other interested parties that are active in the area that it may be beneficial to include in the partnership group.

The partnership group is responsible for organising and providing a neighbourhood watch training course for all contact persons, which should provide them with knowledge about how to protect oneself against crime and how to act when you discover a crime in the process of being committed (see Collaboration Against Crime at the end of this guide).

**Tasks:**

- Initiate
- Secure resources
- Provide support
- Follow-up the work and modify when required
- Provide and organise neighbourhood watch training for the contact persons.

### **Principal contact person**

The principal contact person functions as a project leader and is responsible for coordinating the practical work of the neighbourhood watch programme. Depending on the nature of the neighbourhood's problems, the principal contact person may work on a voluntary basis or may be an employee of one of the parties in the partnership group, e.g. the landlord or tenants' association. It is important that the principal contact person has strong links to the local area and is accessible within the neighbourhood itself.

**Tasks:**

Planning and coordinating the practical neighbourhood watch work in collaboration with the local working group. Assuming responsibility for communications between the residents, the police and other parties. Assuming responsibility for the recruitment of contact persons.

### **Local working group**

Together with the principal contact person, the local working group constitutes the hub of the neighbourhood watch work. It is here that proposed activities are formulated and adapted to the characteristics of the local area. Through their strong ties to the locality, the members of the group are able to continuously contribute with up-to-date and neighbourhood-specific knowledge, and they participate regularly in the activities of the neighbourhood watch programme.

The group may be put together in different ways, but the landlord, the police (at the implementational level) and the residents should constitute the foundation of the group. Initially, the residents may be represented by the residents' association, but the group should be expanded to include a number of contact persons once the neighbourhood watch work has started. It is also important to try to find other actors with ties to the area who can participate and contribute to the positive development of the neighbourhood. Depending on the needs of the area, these might for example include people from associations, churches, businesses, the social services and schools in the area.

In order to create the correct expectations of one another within the group and to make use of each other's resources in the best way possible, it is a good idea if the parties involved in the group define their different roles in relation to the various tasks that must be carried out. Some may participate in a large number of activities whereas others may need to restrict their involvement to specific aspects of the neighbourhood watch operations.

### **Tasks:**

- Planning neighbourhood watch activities.
- Participating in the practical work of the programme.

### **Contact persons**

In order to maintain levels of interest in and commitment to the neighbourhood watch programme, it may be beneficial to form smaller neighbourhood watch units. In larger multiple family dwellings, a stairwell constitutes a suitable sized unit for this purpose. Try to get one or two contact persons per stairwell to participate in the neighbourhood watch programme.

### **Tasks:**

Receive and pass on tips and ideas between neighbours and the principal contact person. Assume responsibility for certain practical activities, such as putting up signs and anti-theft marking. Pass on knowledge and information about neighbourhood watch to the residents. Additional practical tips on how to work can be found listed at the end of this brochure.

## **Starting neighbourhood watch**

### **Formulate a joint statement of neighbourhood problems**

In order to create a functioning neighbourhood watch programme that works to prevent crime it is important that all parties have a shared understanding of the situation in the neighbourhood. The partnership group should therefore conduct a survey and analysis of the needs to be addressed by neighbourhood watch and the conditions that may affect its implementation. Knowledge is required on both problems and available resources.

#### ***The survey is conducted in two stages:***

1. Make an inventory of existing statistics and of the experiences of those working in the area.
2. Conduct an interview survey among the residents.

### **Inventory of statistics and experiences**

In the first stage of the survey, you collect facts about the neighbourhood and its population. Check whether any studies have been conducted about the residents' levels of perceived safety and satisfaction with the neighbourhood. Find out whether the neighbourhood has problems in the form of e.g. thefts, vandalism or other forms of disturbances. At the same time, think about the different types of resources that are available in the area. Are there any activities that might affect or provide support for the work of neighbourhood watch? Are there any associations, organisations or businesses that are active in the area and that might be able to contribute in some way? Utilise the experiences and knowledge of the partnership group. The members of this group often have a good knowledge of the local situation and conditions.

On the basis of the results of this survey work, the partnership group can arrive at a decision about the direction to be taken in the work with neighbourhood watch and the types of crime that the neighbourhood watch programme should be trying to prevent.

### **The survey work should cover the following areas:**

- The physical residential environment
- The composition of the residential population (age, sex, families/single people, socio-economic situation, language groups)
- Residential mobility

- Crime and social problems
- Perceived safety and satisfaction
- Existing organisations and activities that could contribute to the work of neighbourhood watch.

*Information can be obtained from the following sources (among others):*

- Crime statistics from the National Council for Crime Prevention website
- Demographic composition from municipal statistics
- Statistics relating to reported offences and incident reports from the police
- Disturbance and vandalism reports from landlords
- Surveys of perceived safety and satisfaction from landlords

### **Interviewing the residents**

Knowledge about the residents' levels of perceived safety and satisfaction with the area is a necessary prerequisite for neighbourhood watch. The initial survey should therefore be supplemented with an interview study, whose objective is to obtain more information about the problems and needs experienced by the residents in relation to their sense of safety, and also to what extent they are themselves interested in contributing to creating a better residential neighbourhood.

It is best if the principal contact person and the local working group have already been appointed by this stage so that they can conduct the interviews with the residents.

In order to obtain structured interview results that can be compiled for the purposes of a general analysis, you will need to formulate an interview guide.

It is good to start with a number of open questions. The advantage of open questions is that they provide the interview subjects with the opportunity to themselves define what safety/insecurity means to them. This often creates a good introduction to understanding the perspective of the residents and can provide the basis for the development of a dialogue.

*A few suggestions for open questions:*

- What is important to make your neighbourhood feel safe and pleasant?
- Is (the name of the neighbourhood) that kind of neighbourhood?
- What is missing and what could be improved?
- Would you be interested in joining in to help improve it?

Go on then to formulate a small number of specific and fixed questions about things you want to know for the purposes of your survey. Include space in the interview guide for additional views and comments.

The interviews are conducted by knocking on doors. It will probably be the principal contact person who conducts the interviews along with people from the local working group. Consider which of you is best suited to this task. If there are other language groups than Swedish in the area, it is often valuable if those who conduct the interviews have a multilingual competence. Information folders on neighbourhood watch are available in several languages and can be ordered from the Swedish Theft Prevention Association.

This work will take time, but at the same time provides a unique opportunity to initiate a valuable dialogue with the residents. It is often during these interviews that it is possible to create the initial trust between yourselves and the residents. Listen sensitively and attentively to what the residents have to say about their perceptions of safety. Questions about crime in the area may sometimes be a sensitive issue for the residents to talk about. It is often the case that these questions can be given more detailed attention at the end of the interview, once a certain level of confidence has been established between the residents and the person conducting the interview.

Before you start knocking on doors, the partnership group should send out a letter containing information about the interviews, their purpose and general information about the types of issues you want to discuss. The letter should also tell the residents who will be conducting the interviews and the period during which the interviews will take place. It should also tell the residents about neighbourhood watch and why you want to start a neighbourhood watch programme in the area. Proceed on the basis of the initial inventory and the needs you have seen, but maintain a positive tone with a focus on opportunities rather than problems. Emphasise the residents' role in the work. One way of doing this may be to describe how people have worked somewhere else and the positive experiences this work has produced. You may also need to provide this information in languages other than Swedish.

### **Analysis and central goals**

The interviews with the residents should then be compiled together with the results of the initial inventory. Do the interview responses reflect the results of the survey? If not, in what ways are they different and what might explain these differences? It is this analytical work that will provide a fundamental understanding of the problems experienced by the residents and the neighbourhood. This knowledge bank will then provide the foundation on which you formulate and implement your neighbourhood watch programme.

On the basis of the analysis, the partnership group can formulate the central goals of the neighbourhood watch programme. It is important that the principal contact person is also included in this analysis and planning work.

Make sure that you work to meet the needs of the residents! When you take concrete action focused on the residents' problems, this can serve to strengthen their confidence both in relation to the partnership group and the neighbourhood watch programme.

Statistics and interviews provide a picture of local problems and their possible causes, which will in turn trigger ideas about how they can be prevented. The partnership group will be able to implement certain measures directly, such as removing graffiti or replacing doors for example. You can also make use of the book "Bo Tryggt 05" [Live safely 05], to find more suggestions for relevant measures. (See the source list at the end of this brochure.)

Measures that require the involvement of the residents can be spread by means of information passed on by the principal contact person. This might for example include being careful to ensure that self-locking doors close properly after you pass through them. There are a range of crime prevention and safety enhancing measures that can be combined to advantage within the framework provided by neighbourhood watch. To take one example, the principal contact person can initiate community safety surveys and night patrols. (See the source list at the end of this brochure.)

Signs with the symbol of the "broken crowbar" can be obtained from the Collaboration Against Crime organisation (Samverkan mot brott) and put up in neighbourhood watch areas. Community police officers or those responsible for crime prevention issues at the municipality can order material free from the website of the Collaboration Against Crime.

## **Establishing neighbourhood watch**

### **Stairwell meetings**

In order to interest the residents and get them involved in the neighbourhood watch work, the principal contact person and the local working group should create meeting places. Meetings for residents living on the same stairwell, so-called stairwell meetings, which are preferably held in the stairwell itself, constitute a good method in this respect.

By restricting the work of neighbourhood watch to smaller units, it becomes possible to focus the discussions on issues that affect the residents' immediate environment and it becomes easier

to get them involved. The question of which members of the working group should participate will depend on the issues that are taken up. The meetings often focus on crime and perceived insecurity and in such cases it is good if the police are present and can answer questions.

One way of getting the residents involved right from the start is to ask one of the residents to invite their neighbours to stairwell meetings. The person who accepts this task need not be the one who will then become the contact person.

Make these meetings as pleasant and possible, and provide coffee and something to eat. Begin the meeting by telling those present about the results from the interviews conducted among the residents and about the measures that the partnership group has implemented or is planning to implement.

Give the participants at the meeting information about how neighbourhood watch works and suggestions about what people can do to increase the levels of safety and well-being in the stairwell and other areas.

It is important to listen to what the residents on a given stairwell are interested in. Be open to suggestions that will lead to increased levels of participation in the neighbourhood. One way of creating interest and involvement may be to allow the residents to decide about the entrance to their stairwell, e.g. to decide that they want an electronic pin-code lock on the door to their stairwell.

### *Formulate safety and cordiality agreements*

In the context of the stairwell meetings it is a good idea to formulate and come to agree on simple safety and cordiality agreements. These may, for example, involve how the residents should help each other to ensure that the entrance is monitored, who to go to if you discover a crime or some other problem, or how refuse should be dealt with.

Agreements can also be reached about the supervision of outside spaces. One simple method of doing this is to put together a schedule on the basis of the residents' everyday routines. People who have dogs, for example, can come to an agreement about which areas they will keep an eye on when they walk their dogs. Or if there is a sporting association that makes use of a jogging route in the area, the members can become involved and asked to be attentive and to let the residents' know if they see anything suspicious.

Decide who is to do what. The principal contact person is responsible for keeping notes and for passing on questions and suggestions to the relevant person in the working group or the partnership group. The notes should also be distributed to all of the residents in the stairwell, or put up on a notice board, so that those who have not participated in the meeting are kept informed.

### *Decide the forms for a continued dialogue*

In order to maintain the dialogue and to be able to inform the residents about what has happened with their suggestions, it is important that the meetings are kept going. Decide where and how you want to meet and maintain contact in the future. If you choose another meeting place than the stairwell, it is important to find a place that feels accessible and "familiar" to the residents.

Appoint one or, ideally, two contact persons in each stairwell. These must be people whom both the residents and you yourselves have confidence in. It can often work well if the residents themselves vote to elect these people. In those cases where residents do not know one another, it may be necessary to make an arrangement with someone in the stairwell that you have confidence in.

### **Utilise communication technology**

In addition to the direct communication between people, the first meeting can also be used to produce texting and e-mail lists for exchanging information. Write down mobile phone num-

bers and e-mail addresses and tell the residents that you will be sending out information on a continuous basis.

The advantage of a digital network is that you are able to get in touch with one another quickly and efficiently. This is particularly important for passing on warnings and tips. In order to maintain interest and involvement, it is important that people feel they are part of things. Everyone in the network therefore needs continuous information about what has happened or is going to happen.

In accordance with the Swedish Personal Information Act, the registration of names always requires the consent of the individual who provides the information. More information about this can be obtained from the website of the Data Inspection Board, see the list of sources at the end of the brochure. The easiest way to handle this is to produce a consent form which includes the relevant personal information, with a space for people to sign. The form should state who is going to be handling the information and the purpose for which the information will be used.

Think about how you want to organise your communications. Who should pass on and receive information, and what type of information dissemination do you want to have. Also think about who should administer the register of participants. If anyone working in the public sector, such as the police or the municipality for example, is responsible for the register, anyone at all will have the right to demand to see it on the basis of the freedom of information principal.

### **Support the contact persons**

Neighbourhood watch is founded on the voluntary involvement and participation of the residents. The contact persons have a crucial role to play in ensuring that neighbourhood watch will continue to function well over the longer term. It is therefore important that the partnership group and the local working group actively support the contact persons.

#### ***Restrict the tasks of the contact persons***

In order to avoid the contact persons becoming overburdened, it is a good idea to set limits on work. This can be achieved in part by restricting the length of time for which a contact person serves in the role, so that new contact persons are chosen on a regular basis, and in part by limiting the number of activities and distributing them among more individuals. In this way, more people become involved in the neighbourhood watch programme while at the same time the workload is reduced.

#### ***Keep the contact persons informed***

The contact persons should continuously be kept updated with information from the principal contact person. In their role as points of contact and in order to be able to keep the other residents informed, the contact persons need to know what is going on and what results different measures and activities have produced.

The partnership group is responsible for providing neighbourhood watch training for all the contact persons.

#### ***Utilise the commitment of the contact persons***

It is a good idea for the principal contact person and the local working group to organise meetings (ideally in the form of workshops) with all of the contact persons in the neighbourhood. These provide an opportunity for people to raise and discuss different issues that are currently of relevance in the neighbourhood. You could also invite people from other organisations that may be of significance for these issues. It is important for the landlord to provide a budget for this, so that it is possible to do something concrete with the proposals that are formulated.

### *Appreciation*

It is very important that the contact persons feel that they are doing something valuable. One way of showing appreciation is for the police and the municipality to invite all of the municipality's (or the municipal district's) contact persons to an annual general meeting.

It is also a good idea to earmark resources in order to be able to show the contact persons some form of appreciation for their active involvement. This might be by inviting them along on a pleasant trip or similar, but also providing coffee and snacks at the meetings.

### **Revitalise and inspire**

Every now and again (about once a year) it can be good to arrange a large-scale event of some kind to produce inspiration and reawaken the commitment to neighbourhood watch in the area. This need not be something that has anything directly to do with crime prevention, but what is important is that you do something together for the neighbourhood. It is good if different generations are involved and if the contact persons can serve as the hub of the activities. Examples may be to organise some kind of sporting event or celebration.

## **The goal of neighbourhood watch**

The goal of neighbourhood watch is to provide residents with the opportunity to participate in the development of their neighbourhood and together with the police, the municipality and other actors in the partnership group to be able to create the conditions to reduce crime and improve levels of safety and security.

The hope is that neighbourhood watch will lead to a positive sense of safety and security permeating the neighbourhood and contributing to the creation of a residential environment that people enjoy being in.

## If you want to know more about neighbourhood watch

### The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention

At the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention's website you can read more about how to work with neighbourhood watch, find out more about different local neighbourhood watch projects and learn what the research shows about neighbourhood watch.

Visit: [www.bra.se/grannsamtverkan](http://www.bra.se/grannsamtverkan)

### Collaboration Against Crime

The Collaboration Against Crime organisation works with neighbourhood watch at the national level. The participant organisations work to disseminate information about neighbourhood watch, draw up common guidelines for the work and produce educational and informational material.

Read more and order material from: [www.samverkanmotbrott.se](http://www.samverkanmotbrott.se)

### Literature

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Bo Tryggt 05 website, [www.botryggt.se](http://www.botryggt.se)

Website of the Data Inspection Board, [www.datainspektionen.se/lagar-och-regler/personuppgiftslagen](http://www.datainspektionen.se/lagar-och-regler/personuppgiftslagen)