



## Successful Practices & Strategies

Vol. 2 | No. 10

# Springfield Police Department

Springfield, Missouri

<http://www.springfieldmo.gov/spd>

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### Community policing element

Community partnerships, problem solving

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### Problem/issue

Quality of life

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### Problem description

Criminal activity concentrated in and around apartment complexes

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### Community policing strategies implemented

As it had done with expanding neighborhood watch concepts to area businesses, the Springfield Police Department’s (SPD) crime prevention unit realized that during neighborhood/business watch training sessions they were excluding a large portion of the citizenry—those who lived in or worked for large apartment complexes. They used existing neighborhood/business watch concepts and researched additional information from other agencies to develop what became known as the apartment watch program.

The concept of applying the neighborhood watch program to apartment complexes within the city of Springfield was developed as the community services section’s crime prevention unit began to see that residents who were willing to participate in the neighborhood watch program were unable to meet the qualifications because they lived in an apartment complex community. The crime prevention unit decided to view each apartment complex as an individual neighborhood.

The apartment watch program operates as a hybrid between the Springfield Police Department’s neighborhood watch and business watch programs. Apartment watch training is open to all residents of the apartment complex community, but the primary focus and attendance requirements are designed for the management and employees of each individual apartment complex. In the apartment watch program, the management takes the role of the “homeowner” as taught in the neighborhood watch program.

Due to the regular turnover rate in apartment living, the crime prevention unit thought the training attendance requirement of 15 percent of the entire watch group (as required in the neighborhood watch program) would prove unattainable for an apartment complex community. Keeping the focus on the management and employees, because they are a more stable part of the apartment complex



community and have the biggest stake in the security and safety of the complex, the training attendance requirement was set at 90 percent of all employees of the apartment complex. The apartment and neighborhood watch training sessions are held quarterly.

Along with the attendance requirement, the apartment watch program mirrors the neighborhood watch program in being required to host two apartment complex events per year. These events are designed to encourage resident-to-resident and resident-to-staff interaction.

A third requirement, focusing on the principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), requires each complex to have one-inch throws for door and deadbolt locks, three-inch screws for locking plates on door areas, peep holes in every unit door, and appropriate lighting in all exterior areas. These CPTED concepts are taught in the business watch program.

Once each of these requirements is met and the apartment watch group submits a copy of their group's bylaws, the crime prevention unit issues free neighborhood watch signs to be posted throughout the apartment complex grounds. It is also encouraged that the police area representative (PAR) officer for the particular area of the apartment complex be photographed with the management of the apartment complex and that the picture be posted in a location viewable by the residents. This photograph is shows residents of the apartment complex that there is a positive working relationship between the apartment complex staff and the Springfield Police Department.

### Change and/or impact as a result of these community policing efforts

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The following are the changes and impacts this community policing effort has had or has the propensity to have and who has benefited or could benefit from it:

**Preventing/identifying criminal activity** – Currently, two apartment complex communities in Springfield have met all the requirements and have active apartment watch groups. One complex has more than 430 units and encompasses approximately 3.5 acres inside the city limits of Springfield. It is home to more than one thousand Springfield residents. A second complex has more than 320 units and is home to approximately one thousand Springfield residents. In addition to these two complexes, the crime prevention unit has recently trained staff members from five other complexes.

As one can imagine, having more than 2,000 residents trained in not only preventing crime but also identifying it is a huge advantage. There are extra sets of eyes and ears available to assist the SPD in their crime fighting efforts. Obviously, the SPD, the residents and employees of the various apartment complexes, and the Springfield citizenry in general could benefit from this program.



**Reporting of criminal activity** – As indicated above, with the extra sets of trained eyes and ears in and around large apartment complexes, it is thought that more criminal activity will be reported to the SPD. Therefore, the SPD will be better informed of ongoing criminal activity and will be better prepared to more efficiently and effectively combat both crimes against persons and property.

**Strengthening the relationship between the SPD and various apartment complexes** – Community engagement is a listed goal of the SPD and is a very important aspect of its crime fighting mission. In addition, community engagement is essential to any crime prevention program, and the apartment watch is no different. Since its inception, the apartment watch program has strengthened the relationship between the SPD and the various apartment complexes that have received the training. Residents and employees of the apartment complexes feel more confident in their ability to prevent, identify, and report crime in and around their complexes. This benefit to both entities, the SPD and the various apartment complexes, cannot be quantified.

### Lessons learned through program implementation

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After the crime prevention unit had revised the SPD's neighborhood watch program and followed it with the business watch program, it was not long until they realized that they needed to develop a program that focused on apartment complexes. Apartment complexes generally have large numbers of residents, which can be attractive to would-be criminals. By developing and implementing the apartment watch program, the crime prevention unit has assisted the SPD in enhancing its efforts in combating criminal behavior. After being trained, one Springfield apartment manager stated the following:

Our property has been part of the apartment watch program since the beginning of the year. We have noticed this as being an excellent source of comfort for our prospective and current residents. We cannot guarantee anyone's safety; however, we can do our best to deter crime. This is an excellent way to do just that. So far we have noticed the community as a whole working together more in situations to resolve issues if and as they arise. This has also encouraged more of our residents to communicate with the office on concerns with their community and surroundings and not just the normal day-to-day apartment living.

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Published 2015