

## Neighborhood Watch for Animals Tip Sheet

In 1972, amid concerns about the growing U.S. crime rate, Americans latched on to a novel way to deal with the 8.2 million burglaries, arsons, assaults and other reported crimes that year (up from 6.9 million cases just five years earlier): Across the nation, friends and neighbors formed Neighborhood Crime Watches in conjunction with their local authorities.

More than 30 years later, the results speak for themselves. In a January 1998 article in *Sheriff* magazine, published by the National Sheriffs' Association, the association's director of crime prevention noted: "From its inception, the growth and impact of Neighborhood Watch has exceeded all expectations. It is now one of the most widely-known crime prevention programs in history, reaching thousands of people in urban, suburban, and rural areas...The program's popularity among the law enforcement community and the public at large remains at a high level, attesting to the effectiveness of this crime prevention initiative.

In the very next paragraph, the article then mentioned that the "longevity of Neighborhood Watch is attributed to the fact that the program is flexible to suit the needs of each community, and can be adapted to any environment (e.g., Marina Watch, Campus Watch, Ranch Watch, Church Watch)."

The HSUS would like to suggest that the Neighborhood Crime Watch exhibit even more flexibility: to incorporate the animals.

After all, pets and wildlife need care and protection, too, and a Neighborhood Watch for Animals can make a community safer for everyone who lives there. If your neighborhood already has a Watch program, you can share these ideas with other participants. Or you can start a Neighborhood Watch for Animals program of your own.

To help protect animals in your community, follow these suggestions:

### **Know Your Neighborhood's Pets**

In a perfect world, no pets would be out on their own, roaming the neighborhood. But unfortunately, some dogs and cats escape or are allowed to roam unsupervised. Some have regular routes and know their way home; others get lost and need help to get back to their families.

The more you know about the animals in your neighborhood, the more you'll be able to help. It can be as simple as paying attention to the dogs and cats who live around you. That way, when you see an animal out alone, you'll be more likely to know how to contact his or her owner or how to get the animal home.

Consider creating a neighborhood roster of pets and pet owners to use in emergencies. Include pets' names, basic descriptions or photographs, and contact information. Encourage all pet owners to keep collars and identification tags on their pets. And keep the phone number for your local animal shelter or animal control agency handy in case you see a pet you don't know or an animal who needs assistance.

### **Pay Attention to Abuse, Neglect, and Abandonment**

A dog left chained or tethered outside without food, water or shelter. A sick or injured animal whose condition goes untreated. A house teeming with cats. An animal showing obvious signs of abuse. A neighborhood child who throws rocks at squirrels. Pets left behind in homes or apartments, or on the street, when their owners move. All are cases of neglect and abuse that put animals in danger. They may also violate the law.

You can help first by being observant. Is a situation getting worse? Do you hear barking, whimpering, meowing or scratching from inside a home after the resident has moved? Do you see an act of overt cruelty? Don't turn your back. But don't put yourself at risk through direct confrontation. Call the police or your local animal shelter immediately. Also be alert to increasing reports of animal abuse—there could be a serial abuser in your area.

### **Watch for Pets in Parked Cars**

A pet left in a parked car can be in danger, especially in warm weather. On a warm day, the temperature in a parked car can reach more than 100 degrees in a matter of minutes, even with the windows partially open. A pet can easily suffer heatstroke or suffocate and die. If you see a pet in a car who appears to be showing signs of heat stress, call police or an animal shelter right away. Watch for pets left in cars in cold weather as well.

## **Stranger Danger**

If pets start disappearing in your neighborhood or you see an increasing number of "lost pet" signs, advise your neighbors to be on the look-out for a potential pet thief. Urge pet owners to keep their animals safely confined or appropriately supervised. Be sure to alert your local animal shelter to your suspicions as well.

## **Be Aware of Domestic Violence Situations**

In homes where there is violence, pets may be abused as well as people. Often, domestic violence victims stay in their homes to protect their pets. If you know of a domestic situation in which someone is in danger, contact the police or your local domestic violence hotline. If you know there are pets in the home, tell the police or also contact your local animal shelter. Make the call, even if you make it anonymously.

## **Help the Elderly**

Companion animals can play important roles in the lives of elderly people. But dogs and cats can also be a hardship to those who have trouble providing essential pet care. Offer to assist by walking dogs, cleaning litter boxes, feeding pets, or taking pets to the veterinarian. If you notice that an elderly neighbor's pet is suddenly left outside or appears to be sick, take note. It can be a sign that your neighbor is unable to care for the animal, or even an indication that the older person is being abused by a caretaker. Your local animal shelter or social services department should be advised.

## **Designate a Dog-Friendly Area**

A dog park, or an area where dog owners and their pets can gather, can help foster community, help neighbors get to know one another, and even help prevent owners from letting their pets run at large. Talk to your neighbors, the local animal care and control agency, and city or county administrators to see if fencing in an area just for dogs and their people is a possibility in your neighborhood.

## **Look Out for Your Wild Neighbors**

Like pets, birds, squirrels, and other neighborhood wildlife can be victims of cruelty and abuse. If children or adults torment or injure any animals, the incident should be reported. Remember that cruelty to animals is connected to violence toward humans, and all acts of animal abuse should be taken seriously.

## **Start Early**

Encourage local schools to teach humane education. You can also provide the award-winning publication for elementary school children, *KIND News*<sup>™</sup>, through our Adopt-a-Classroom program. For subscription information, contact The HSUS's youth education division, the National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (NAHEE), at 67 Norwich Essex Turnpike, East Haddam, CT 06423-1736.

## **Work Together**

If you're part of a Neighborhood Watch for Animals or any community anti-violence program, make sure you're in communication with your local animal shelter and other groups that work to prevent violence. There is strength in numbers and in recognizing that violence is violence, regardless of the victim. If you produce materials about protecting pets, it's a good idea to translate them into Spanish or any other language prevalently used in your community.

You can also learn about the benefits of establishing a Neighborhood Crime Watch program in your community through the National Crime Prevention Council.