

Being a Good Witness



Crimes are frequently solved as a result of a partnership between the community and its police department. This partnership is vital to keeping our community safe from criminals who look to take advantage of our citizens. Without this vital link between citizens and the police department, crimes may go unreported and unsolved.

The Colonial Heights Police Department relies on the community to report suspicious activity, crimes in progress or crimes that have just occurred. There are times when a resident will observe suspicious activity but fail to report it to the police department. This is often because they don't want to bother the police department or fear they may be embarrassed if the activity turns out to be "nothing." The Colonial Heights Police Department encourages citizens to call at the first sign of suspicious activity.

Being a good witness means not placing yourself or others in danger. Remain calm enough to call the police and provide critical information. Statistics show that 64% of victims don't report their crime to the police. Some people's instincts are to scare suspects away, chase after them or confront the suspects after seeing a crime occur. It's better not to confront or get involved in a conflict with the suspect. Be a good witness and call the police.

Being a good witness will give the police the opportunity to apprehend the suspect(s) as quickly as possible. If the crime involves property such as a larceny from auto or a petty theft, ask yourself "should I risk my safety and well being for a property crime?" The answer is "no!". You may not see the suspect carrying a gun, but keep in mind that handguns and other weapons are easily concealed.

The type of crime committed won't tell you what type of suspect you are dealing with. Never get between a suspect and his/her escape route.

If you see a crime in progress, call 911. If possible, and without endangering yourself, continue to monitor any activity you can observe. A police dispatcher will answer 911 and will ask a series of questions relating to the activity you're witnessing. Being able to quickly articulate your location will assist the officers in their response. During this stressful time it's important for you to remain calm so you can clearly answer the dispatcher's questions. Listen to the police dispatcher for direction and guidance. Some of the questions may not seem pertinent to you, but dispatchers are trained to know exactly what information the officers need to respond quickly and safely. This means that a dispatcher may need to interrupt you while you're relaying information. It is important that during emergencies, your answers are direct and brief. Keep in mind during emergencies, officers are usually dispatched by a second dispatcher as the information is obtained by the dispatcher taking your call. The faster the dispatcher can obtain the necessary information from you, the faster it is relayed to the officers responding.

The dispatcher may let you know when an officer has arrived on the scene. If the suspect(s) leave before you see police officers, tell the dispatcher and let them know the direction and method of travel.

When you call to report a crime in progress, the type of information that the dispatcher will likely ask you to supply will include the following:

Suspects:

- Sex (male, female)
- Race - Ethnicity (White, Asian, Middle Eastern, Hispanic, African-American)
- Height - Sometimes it may be hard to give a height on a subject. If possible, use a vertical object to compare the subject's height with. Officers can later look at this object and determine a height.
- Weight/Build - Slim, Heavy, Muscular, etc.
- Hair - Color and style of hair (Blond, brown etc. and short, long, curly etc.)
- Facial Features - clean shaven, mustache, beard, etc.
- Clothing description - type and color of shirt (short sleeve, long sleeve, striped solid, etc) and pants (jeans, long shorts, etc).
- Any other unusual characteristics or distinguishing features of the subject (tattoos, scars, glasses, etc).

Suspects Vehicle:

- Vehicle Make - Ford, Chevy, etc.
- Vehicle Model - Mustang, Impala, etc.
- Vehicle Style - 2 door, 4 door, wagon, hatchback, SUV
- Vehicle Color
- Vehicle License Plate
- Any identifiable marks (vehicle body damage possibly from old car accident), bumper stickers, custom rims, spoiler, etc.

Remember your safety comes first! Don't be afraid to call the police department. "Crime Prevention is everyone's responsibility!" With your help, we can keep Colonial Heights among the safest cities in the country.