



PALM BEACH COUNTY  
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Palm Beach County  
Board of County Commissioners

# RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM



MODULE 4  
BE PREPARED, BE SAFE!



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## Introduction

Most people want to live in a place that is safe, welcoming and well kept. If your neighborhood is experiencing crime, vandalism and illegal dumping, it is time to come together to bring about positive change. Although this might seem like a daunting task, you will not be doing it alone. The neighborhood association's role is to coordinate efforts between the organization, its partners (like local government, police department, nonprofits and area businesses) and to advocate for projects and programs that will improve, and promote, the health and safety of your neighborhood.

The power to change your community, and keep it safe, is in your hands. You cannot wait for government or anyone else to do it all. Real change occurs when residents identify the issues and come together to create a strategic plan of action to address their concerns. Working from the strategic plan, a neighborhood group or association can effectively prepare itself in the event of an emergency and help curtail criminal activity in a community.

Your neighborhood organization should serve as the leader and coordinating entity, as well as the source of information on crime reduction and emergency management within the community. As such, the organization should keep residents updated on its efforts and outcomes. The more residents see successful outcomes, the more likely they will buy into the organization efforts.

In this module, you will learn specific strategies that your neighborhood group or association, as well as individual residents can implement to make your neighborhood a safe and attractive place to live.

## Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office

The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office (PBSO) embraces the concept of community policing. This means that PBSO works in partnership with citizens and other County agencies such as Code Enforcement, Building and Zoning, Fire Rescue, Animal Care and Control, and the Solid Waste Authority to help reduce crime and improving quality of life issues. This comprehensive approach has led to major decreases in crime in neighborhoods across the County.

If your neighborhood is not currently working with PBSO, find out the name of your community policing deputy and ask if he/she can attend your monthly meetings and provide the CrimeStat reports for your neighborhood. Residents should communicate any areas of concern to the deputy.

Community policing relies on the eyes and ears of residents to help them prevent crime. Residents need to understand that PBSO deputies cannot be everywhere and therefore need residents as their partners.

### PBSO Neighborhood Watch Program

Citizen participation is one of the most effective tools against crime because the job of stopping burglary, larceny or criminal activity is impossible for the Sheriff's Office to accomplish alone. Neighborhood Watch is a network of neighbors trained by crime prevention officers in home security, recognition and identification of suspicious persons and/or activity.

Neighborhood Watch is an "observe and report" type of program. Neighborhood Watch members are encouraged not to stop and question people, but rather to observe and report their observations to the Sheriff's Office. A trained officer will respond and investigate the incident.

A member of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Crime Prevention Unit will assist any community that wishes to start a Neighborhood Watch. A community representative is required to manage the program. The Sheriff's Office will assist with training and provide speakers on crime prevention topics at regular meetings. Watch groups are encouraged to invite other organizations to speak and share their resources. New Neighborhood Watch groups are provided with Neighborhood Watch signs.

To start a Neighborhood Crime Watch Group or for more information, contact the Crime Prevention Unit at **561-688-4853**.

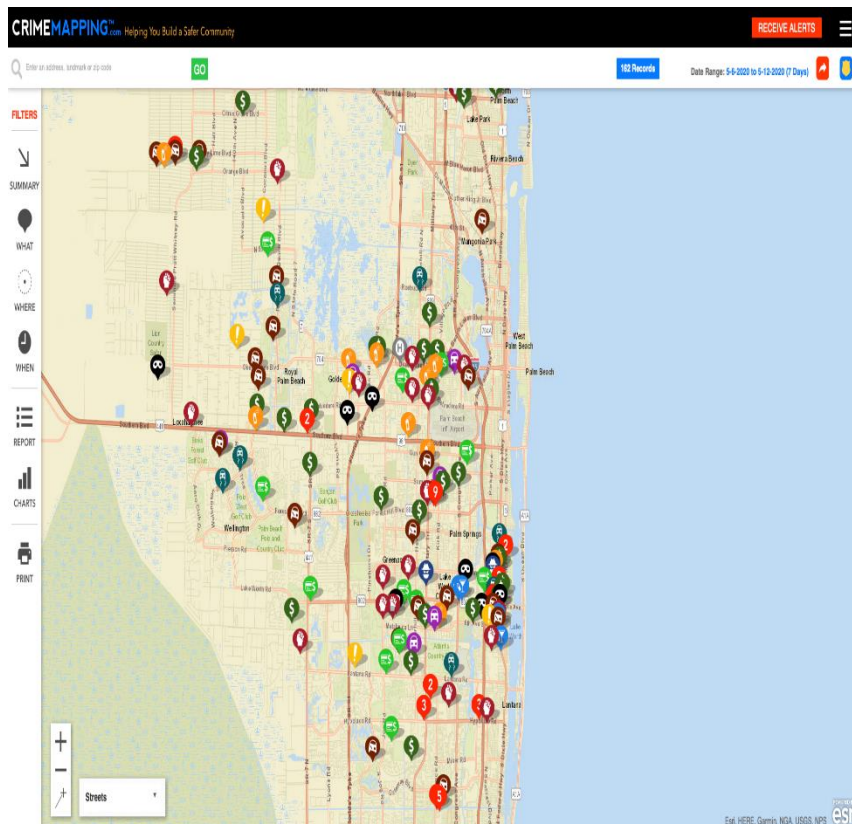
## Crime Mapping

CrimeMapping.com was developed to help law enforcement agencies provide the public with valuable information about recent crime activity in their neighborhood. The goal of CrimeMapping.com is to assist police departments in reducing crime through a better-informed citizenry. Creating more self-reliance among community members is a great benefit to community oriented policing efforts everywhere, and has been proven effective in combating crime.

The CrimeMapping website (<https://www.crimemapping.com/map/fl/palmbeachcounty>) allows you to view a map of your neighborhood, which shows criminal activity. Data from PBSO is automatically imported into the CrimeMapping database on a regular basis therefore; the information being viewed is the most current available. This data is always verified for accuracy and all address information is generalized by block in order to help ensure privacy is protected.

Once you locate your neighborhood, you can click on any of the symbols to see the types of crime occurring in the area. You can also create multiple alerts that track crime and/or sex offender movement in your neighborhood. You will receive an email as new activity occurs.

CrimeMapping is a powerful tool for neighborhoods. Knowledge of what is happening crime wise in a neighborhood allows residents to be prepared and advocate for greater policing efforts.



## 911 - When to Call, When Not to Call

Calling 911 is often our first response to real and perceived threats to our safety. However, there are general guidelines that, if followed, will get you the correct first responders without overwhelming the 911 system. Below are examples of when you should call 911.

1. **A fire breaks out** - Any fire, even a tiny grease fire in your kitchen is an automatic 911 call. A fire can grow and spread rapidly, so call right away even if you think you can put out the flames on your own.
2. **A medical emergency** - Call 911 immediately for any life-threatening medical problems. According to the American College of Emergency Physicians, these include chest pain, shortness of breath, choking, difficulty speaking, drowning, numbness, poisoning, sudden intense pain, severe burns, a suicide threat or other serious medical problems.
3. **You witness a crime or possible crime** - If you see an assault, burglary or even a suspicious person lurking, call 911. It is better to call for help than to have the police show up later to ask if you saw anything because they are investigating a break-in up the street.
4. **If you are in, or you see a car crash** - Call 911, especially if someone is hurt or feels dizzy or unwell. For a fender bender where you are 100 percent sure, everyone is OK; you can call the police directly.

Unfortunately, some people do not understand the purpose of 911. People call to ask about the weather, complain about their fast food order, etc. Frivolous calls to 911 are taken seriously and those callers can face fines and/or arrest. Do not call 911 in the following situations:

- A loud party or barking dog
- A power outage
- Burst water pipes
- To ask about paying a ticket
- You have a cold or flu symptoms
- Someone has a minor cut

Many 911 centers operate with only a few dispatchers, so if you call for the wrong reasons, you could delay help for someone with a real emergency.

If, and when you have to call 911, here is what to do to ensure you get the help you need:

- **Know your location.** "Where is your emergency?" is the first question dispatchers will ask because location is the top piece of information they need to send help. That is especially important if you are calling from your cell phone because the dispatcher might not be able to pinpoint exactly where you are calling from. If you do not know where you are, look for buildings, landmarks and street signs.
- **Answer the dispatcher's questions.** A dispatcher will ask many questions, but he/she has important reasons for each one. Your answers help the dispatcher determine what kind of help you need. For example, a dispatcher might send an advanced life support

ambulance staffed with a paramedic and special equipment (compared to a basic life support ambulance with EMTs) for a possible heart attack, or they might send three squad cars if a suspicious person has a gun.

- **Follow instructions.** The dispatcher is trained to help keep you safe and explain how to provide first aid while help is on the way. For example, he/she can instruct you on how to do CRP, walk you through the Heimlich maneuver to help someone who is choking, tell you how to stop bleeding, and/or give instruction on the birth of a child.

## Preventing Crime by Connecting Neighbors

As the song says on Sesame Street... *"Who are the people in your neighborhood?"* Do you know your neighbors? If you do not, you are not alone. In today's busy life, there is often no extra time to connect with our neighbors. However, your neighbors may be the first ones to respond in an emergency, call the police if they see something suspicious, and/or help you when you are in need.

When you take the time to introduce yourself to your neighbors, tell them what house you live in and exchange telephone numbers. You have just developed a connection! This connection among neighbors is personalized and, therefore, people are more likely to watch out for you and your home once they know you. Connecting with your neighbors does not mean you have to socialize with them but it does create a network of people you can call on for help.

Conversely, as you reach out to connect with your neighbors you may discover that some of them live alone, are elderly or disabled. You can provide a sense of comfort to them by giving them your contact information in the event they too have an emergency.

If someone is breaking into your car or your dog gets loose, wouldn't you want to know about it? Having neighbors who have your contact information and recognize your children, pets and cars is priceless. The police depend on the eyes and ears of people in the neighborhood to help them. Banding together and communicating with each other is the first line of defense in preventing crime.

Who would you call in the event of an emergency? Who could call on you? Can you name four of your neighbors, and do you have their contact information? This simple form below can be used by each resident to share contact information with their adjacent neighbors. It can be made into a magnet by the neighborhood organization and placed on the refrigerator for quick access.

Name: _____		Name: _____
Phone No: _____		Phone No: _____
Emergency Contact: _____		Emergency Contact: _____
Emergency No: _____		Emergency No: _____
Special Needs: _____		Special Needs: _____
		
Name: _____		Name: _____
Phone No: _____		Phone No: _____
Emergency Contact: _____		Emergency Contact: _____
Emergency No: _____		Emergency No: _____
Special Needs: _____		Special Needs: _____

Get to know your neighbors! They can keep an extra close watch on your home while you are out of town and can report any suspicious activity to the police!

### Neighborhood Database

The Office of Community Revitalization offers at no cost to Countywide Community Revitalization (CCRT) designated neighborhoods, access to an online database program that allows neighborhood organizations to enter residents' contact information. This information can be the name, address, email, telephone number, and emergency contact, and any other information residents may want to share about special needs they may have in the event that assistance is needed in the event of a disaster such as a hurricane (e.g. they are on oxygen, are elderly, are handicapped, etc).

Information in the database can be organized by street name, by people who need assistance, etc. When used in conjunction with a neighborhood emergency preparedness plan, the database can serve as a powerful tool as it can enable residents to be quickly informed about an impending emergency, and first responders can be directed to those residents who need assistance.

Information on the database is for the sole use of the neighborhood association and cannot be sold or shared with persons outside of the neighborhood. If you want to learn more about this tool, contact Vivian Ryland, Senior Planner, at 561-233-5318 or [vryland@pbcgov.org](mailto:vryland@pbcgov.org).



## One Call Now

The Office of Community Revitalization offers CCRT neighborhoods the free use of One Call Now on a case-by-case basis and based on funding availability for its use. Neighborhood groups or organizations to alert residents of road construction, neighborhood meetings and emergencies can use this tool. Messages are delivered via phone call, text and/ or e-mail.

Messages can be sent in multiple formats according to the urgency of the situation and contact preference of text message, email, phone call or mobile app. Senders can also select multiple formats for urgent messages. The One Call Now app can be downloaded to your phone and with a few steps hundreds of residents can be contacted in minutes.

To utilize One Call Now, neighborhoods must have a database of residents with their contact information - phone number and email. The system is automated and is easy to use. If you want to learn more about this tool, contact George Schott, Planning Technician at 561-233-2482 or [schott@pbcgov.org](mailto:schott@pbcgov.org).

## Nextdoor

Nextdoor ([Nextdoor.com](http://Nextdoor.com)) is a free digital social networking service available to neighborhoods to connect residents with each other and those nearby- businesses and public services, and keep them informed. Neighborhoods can set up an account and encourage neighbors to sign up through social media, at meetings or through a newsletter. Residents then register with Nextdoor.

This tool allows neighbors to communicate suspicious activity, share information about lost pets, and to keep each other informed about meetings and events. Nextdoor allows residents to post videos or photos of suspicious people and lost or found pets. If you are on the Nextdoor app, you will receive updates via text or e-mail as residents post them (see example below).

To sign up and connect to your neighborhood, visit [www.nextdoor.com](http://www.nextdoor.com) and enter your complete street address and email.

## Sample Nextdoor Post



Betty Boop, Happy Valley Neighborhood

### **Suspicious Activity**

I live on the corner of Lovely and Main. I noticed a guy walking back and forth in front of my neighbor's house, leaning on the road sign and kicking the neighbors fence. A little while later a white car drove up and rolled down his window, handed a small plastic packet, the guy on the street gave him a wad of money, and then both disappeared quickly. Just alerting the neighborhood, as we all know the effect of drug sales our quality of life. I took some photos so you can see if you recognize the guys.

## Home Safety

Preventing crime starts at home. Thieves look for easy opportunity so do not give it to them. PBSO deputy's report that much of the property crimes they see are where the owner did not lock his/her car or house, or left a wallet or other valuable visible inside the car. Each of these crimes could have been prevented.

To protect your home and car:

- Make sure windows and doors cannot be easily pried open.
- Install deadbolts on all your outside doors. Burglars have a hard time breaking into those types of locks.
- When you move into a new house, change the locks or ask the property owner to do it. Do not hide a key outside.
- Keep plant material trimmed around walkways and entrances. This will make it hard for thieves to find places to hide.
- Store ladders, tools, bicycles and other valuables out of the public view. Thieves to break in can easily use ladders and tools.

- Make sure you have adequate exterior lighting. Install motion-sensing lights around your home, especially at entrances. They help keep thieves away from home. Consider an alarm system as well.
  - Install large reflective house numbers so police officers or fire rescue can find your home in an emergency.
  - Make sure you always lock your car, roll up your windows, and close your sunroof, even when you are home. Never leave your car running unattended, no matter where you are.
  - Do not hide a spare set of keys on or near the car.
  - Remove all valuables from your car or put them in the trunk out of plain sight.
- Be aware of your surroundings, especially in garages, parking lots, and gas stations!

## Making Your Neighborhood Safer

### Speed Humps

Many of the neighborhoods the Office of Community Revitalization (OCR) serves, experience issues with speeding cars or all-terrain vehicles. The OCR can help through its Neighborhood Speed Hump Installation Program. The program is a traffic-calming program designed to aid citizens in determining if their street has a speeding problem, and slowing motor vehicles through the installation of speed humps. Speed humps encourage drivers to slow down on streets where speeding is prevalent. The County installs low profile humps that still allow fire and other emergency vehicles to easily access areas in need.

Once your neighborhood group or association has identified the streets that would benefit from speed humps, you will need to contact the OCR and request petition forms for signature by residents on the streets proposed for speed humps.

Signed petitions will need to be forwarded to the OCR for processing and review by the Traffic Engineering Division. All neighborhood petitioned requests for speed humps are evaluated based on roadway traffic volume, average vehicle speed, patterns of cut through traffic, and crash history. At least sixty percent of the affected property owner must support, and agree to the installation of speed humps.

Projects are subject to availability of funds and the approval of the proposed speed humps by both Traffic Engineering and the Board of County Commissioners. For more information about the OCR's Neighborhood Speed Hump Installation Program, please contact Dr. Audley Reid, Senior Planner, at 561-233-5567 or at [AREid@pbcgov.org](mailto:AREid@pbcgov.org).

## Streetlights

A study published in April of 2019, looked at the relationship between streetlights and crime. Temporary streetlights were installed at random public housing developments throughout New York City for a six-month period. It was found that communities that had the streetlights experienced sizable reductions in crime. At a minimum, crime was reduced by 36 percent.<sup>1</sup>

The Office of Community Revitalization's Neighborhood Street Lighting Program provides funding for the installation and maintenance of citizen petitioned streetlights at approved locations along County owned and maintained roadways in designated CCRT areas that experience above-average nighttime criminal activity, as well as unsafe pedestrian and vehicular mobility conditions.

The program requires the neighborhood group or association to identify potential locations for streetlights, work with their PBSO community policing officer to confirm that streetlights would help the neighborhood at the locations identified by residents, and collect signatures of support from neighbors on the streets where the lights are proposed. Fifty-one percent of residents on each street must sign the petition for the lights.

Projects are subject to availability of funds and the approval of the proposed sites by Florida Power and Light and the Board of County Commissioners. For more information about the OCR's Neighborhood Street Lighting Program, please call William Wynn, Senior Planner, at 561-233-5168 or at [WWynn@pbcgov.org](mailto:WWynn@pbcgov.org).

## Sidewalks

A sidewalk network is intended to do two things, create a safe way for residents to walk the neighborhood and to connect the neighborhood to parks, schools, etc. However, in neighborhoods without sidewalks, mothers with strollers, children walking to school or their friends' homes and people walking their dogs are forced to walk in the street competing for space with automobiles.

In the last decade, the number of walkers struck and killed by automobiles in the U.S. increased by 35%. A total of 49,340 pedestrians died between 2008 and 2017. In the south, older adults, people of color, and people walking in low-income communities bear a higher share of this harm. In fact, Florida has the highest rate of pedestrian deaths of all states.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from the safety issue, sidewalks encourage people to be more active. People who live in neighborhoods with sidewalks are 47 percent more likely to be active at least 39 minutes a day.

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<sup>1</sup> Reducing Crime through Environmental Design: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment of Street Lighting in New York City, Crime Lab New York, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, Linda. Walking? You're risking your life in Florida, the deadliest state for pedestrians. Miami Herald. January 23, 2019.

A well-constructed sidewalk for a typical residential property might cost about \$2,000, but it can return 15 times that investment in resale value of the home. In a scenario where two houses are nearly identical, the one with a five-foot-wide sidewalk and two street trees not only sells for \$4,000 to \$34,000 more but it also sells in less time.<sup>3</sup>

Many older neighborhoods in Palm Beach County either do not have any sidewalks or have an incomplete sidewalk network. If there are sidewalks in your community that are in need of repair to prevent falls and accidents, please contact the Office of Community Revitalization and we will ensure that your communities concerns are addressed.

Some communities do not want sidewalks because they want to retain their rural character, but if your neighborhood is interested in creating or expanding your sidewalk network, please contact the Office of Community Revitalization. Staff will facilitate a meeting with Engineering, and present your request to the Pathway Review Committee, which meets once annually to review and recommend priority projects for funding to the Board of County Commissioners. Priority is given to sidewalks that link neighborhoods to area schools.

## Keep It Neat and Green

If someone told you that planting a tree could prevent muggings, would you believe them? What if they said picking up litter would reduce break-ins? Surprisingly, these details do appear to make a difference. Neighborhoods that are greener and cleaner are often safer, and researchers have used Google Street View to correlate and predict crime patterns.

Studies show that people are more likely to break the rules when there is litter on the ground or graffiti on buildings. The rate of theft, vandalism and other crimes all go up. An Environmental Quality Survey in England found a link between the presence of garbage and more serious crimes. “We can see that on streets where litter, graffiti and flyer-posting exist, there is also a higher risk of crime when compared with places where they are not present.”

The researchers concluded that one type of antisocial behavior leads to others, because people’s sense of social obligation to others is eroded. “When people think they can get away with it because other people already have, they do,” says Keizer. “The trick is to persuade residents that other residents in the neighborhood will suffer if they fail to observe norms of responsible behavior.”<sup>4</sup>

Trees really do make a difference in a neighborhood. According to a study by the University of Vermont, tall trees that create an overhead canopy correlated to lower crime levels. The researchers compared crime rates to tree cover in various parts of Baltimore, Maryland, to see if one influences the other. The study’s authors “...found that there is a strong inverse relationship

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<sup>3</sup> Sidewalks – A Livability Fact Sheet. AARP Livable Communities. <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/age-friendly-network-resources.html>

<sup>4</sup>Kees Keizer, et al. The Spreading of Disorder Science Magazine. December 12, 2008.

between tree canopy and our index of robbery, burglary, theft and shooting.” The research indicated that a 10% increase in tree canopy was associated with a roughly 12% decrease in crime.<sup>5</sup>

Neighborhood organizations can play an important role in reducing litter, illegal dumping and “greening” up the community with the intent of reducing crime. Some actions neighborhood organizations can take include the following:

- Have quarterly neighborhood cleanups. Give a gift card as a prize for the resident who collects the most trash.
- Sign up to start an Adopt-A-Spot group with the Solid Waste Authority where teens who need community service hours commit to picking up litter on one block of the neighborhood. The program is a litter abatement and beautification program that provides community groups tools and supplies to “adopt” and improve the appearance of specific locations in their communities. To sign up today, complete an Adopt-A-Spot Application, provided at the end of this module, or call the SWA community services team at 561.697.2500 and speak with Linda (ext. 4717) or Joanna (ext. 4701), or email Joanna Aiken at [JAiken@swa.org](mailto:JAiken@swa.org)
- Create a Best Block contest or House of the Month program to instill community pride.
- Work with a nonprofit such as Community Greening to increase or develop a tree canopy. <https://communitygreening.org>
- Encourage children under ten years old to become part of improving their community. Children who work on positive projects are more likely to have higher self-esteem, perform better in school and less likely to use drugs and alcohol. One of those programs can be the “Superhero” program where young children can help the neighborhood by planting flowers, seeds, etc.

## Emergency Management Plan

Having an emergency disaster plan for your neighborhood could save lives and minimize property damage. Cabana Colony, one of the County’s Countywide Community Revitalization Team (CCRT) neighborhoods, has a plan in place to assist elderly or disabled residents to assist with the placement of their storm shutters, boarding up windows, and trimming trees near their homes to prevent damage in the event of a storm. When a hurricane is approaching, they get the word out about their willingness to assist residents in need.

An emergency management plan is an action plan developed to mitigate the damage of potential events that could endanger lives and structures, as well as interrupt the flow of goods and services. As we have seen, hurricanes are not the only threat to communities. Pandemics also challenge a community’s health and welfare. To survive threats, communities must come together and help those most in need.

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<sup>5</sup> Jackie Flynn Mogensen, The Surprising Science of Fighting Crime with Trees, Mother Jones, May/June 2019 issue

The key elements of an emergency management plan include:

- **Planning**- This is where your community works through various emergency scenarios. The unexpected, the unheard of, the “it could never happen here”, all should be considered in the development of emergency preparedness plan.
- **Training** – Training is important to help those responsible for executing the plan to become knowledgeable, confident and prepared. Having an understanding of what to do and when to do it will help people act quickly and effectively in emergencies.
- **Practice** – At least annually, practice implementing the emergency plan so it is fresh in people’s minds.
- **Education** – Let neighborhood residents know about the emergency management plan. Give them a forum to ask questions and to let you know if they need special assistance in an emergency. In any neighborhood there are people on oxygen, in wheelchairs or have other special conditions who will need priority assistance. Try to collect this information and enter it into your neighborhood database noting that these residents may need assistance.
- **Technology** – Utilize technology to communicate emergency plans. The OCR offers neighborhoods the use of One Call Now that can automatically text, call and e-mail residents about emergencies and who to call if they need assistance.
- **Communication** – Your neighborhood emergency plan should be shared with the Palm Beach County Sheriff’s office, Fire Rescue and Emergency Management. Sharing your plan in advance with these agencies will help ensure coordination in an emergency.
- **Preparedness** – Your neighborhood can apply to the OCR Neighborhood Engagement and Transformation (NEAT) grant program to purchase emergency equipment. This can include yard maintenance equipment to cut back trees, orange cones to block dangerous areas, CPR training and two-way radios.
- **Recovery** – To help your neighborhood recover quickly, have a team that can inventory damage to both public and private property by address and prioritize repairs.
- **Mitigation** – According to the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), mitigation is the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. In order for mitigation to be effective, you need to take action before a disaster to reduce human and financial consequences later. Disasters can happen at any time and in any place; their human and financial consequences are hard to predict.

Neighborhood associations can play a big and critical role in helping to mitigate the impacts of a disaster. Some mitigation efforts your neighborhood can implement are as follows:

- **Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors** - Palm Beach County Fire Rescue works with neighborhood groups to install free smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in residents’ homes. For more information on this program, call 561-616-7033.
- **Install visible house numbers** - Fire Rescue also works with neighborhood groups to install reflective house numbers so they are easily visible to fire and emergency management staff. For more information on this program, call 561-616-7033.

- **Identify residents who need assistance evacuating, boarding up or who have chronic medical issues.** The OCR offers neighborhood organizations access to a free online database program where this information can be entered, organized and accessed. For more information, contact Vivian Ryland, Senior Planner, at [vryland@pbcgov.org](mailto:vryland@pbcgov.org).
- **Educate residents about hurricane and disaster preparedness** - Ask the Palm Beach County Department of Emergency Management to make a presentation at one of your organization meetings.
- **Conduct periodic neighborhood windshield assessments.** To identify overgrown trees that need trimming damaged power poles, areas that flood regularly, etc. and inform the proper County departments for handling.

The role of residents and neighborhood organizations in emergency preparedness cannot be overemphasized. While hurricanes and other disasters cannot be prevented, they can be handled so that the impact to residents and their homes is minimized.