

Neighbourhood Watch expands

Wider safety role seen

Neighbourhood Watch units in the Australian Capital Territory could be asked to extend their assistance to the AFP, Assistant Commissioner Brian Bates of ACT region has disclosed.

He was speaking at the recent signing of a new three-year agreement with the NRMA insurance group on the operations of Neighbourhood Watch in the Territory.

The NRMA has sponsored Neighbourhood Watch since its inception in the ACT. A measurable decrease in the number of burglaries in Canberra has been recorded of the operation which, it is believed, as a result enjoys the most successful coverage of any town or city in Australia - 100 per cent.

The ACT District Manager of the NRMA, Mr Neil Burnside, said his organisation had contributed \$100,000 towards the cost of Neighbourhood Watch in the Territory since 1985.

More than 3,600 people are actively involved with the system, including region and zone co-ordinators.

"We benefit from it as an insurance company," Mr Burnside said, "and so do others.

"It has already been more than enough to justify our outlay and our continued involvement.

"Without it we would see levels of burglary escalate as they have done in the States,

"But here the rate is about one third what it is in Sydney and about the same proportion compared with Melbourne.

I believe the people of Canberra are benefiting from it as the level of burglaries drops here while it continues to rise elsewhere.

"There are problems of course, as



Assistant Commissioner Brian Bates and Mr Neil Burnside, NRMA's ACT Area Manager, sign a new three-year agreement on sponsorship of Neighbourhood Watch. At left is Ms Annmaree Millane, NRMA's ACT Neighbourhood Watch Liaison Officer.



there always are with strictly voluntary organisations, but Neighbourhood Watch here has attracted very good people and it helps too the development of very good police-community relations. And we have new people coming in all the time."

Assistant Commissioner Bates disclosed that decisions were in hand which would help improve the effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Watch system.

"When you look at the cost of burglaries to people in the ACT compared with those in the States you get some idea of its effectiveness.

"The average cost per policy of a burglary in the ACT is \$17 compared with \$46 for NSW as a whole and \$77 in Sydney."

Mr Bates said he would approach the Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinating committee to see if the community reporting activity could be extended slightly to help police with some criminal investigations.

"Neighbourhood Watch is an existing network from which I believe the police could substantially benefit from an information and assistance point of view in Canberra," he said.

"We might be looking at requests for assistance from this well-established network when we are looking for instance for a person committing a particular type of crime.

"It would be very helpful to the police if we were able to utilise the network for this sort of work without affecting its existing valuable functions.

"Or, if the police want to get a message through to the community there is no better way of doing it than on a person-to-person basis such as Neighbourhood Watch could provide," Mr Bates said.