



Van Zandt County **PRECINCT WATCH PROGRAM**

Member Code of Conduct

PWP Members are citizen volunteers and must remember - it is **unlawful** to represent oneself as a law enforcement officer. For the sake of this document the term "member" relates to someone who has properly applied for and received acceptance into the Precinct Watch Program. In order to remain as a member in good standing the following rules of conduct must be followed:

1. At no time shall a member carry on any partisan, racial, religious, business promotion or divisive activities at meetings, patrols, or while otherwise performing within the Precinct Watch Program.
2. Members shall not disclose any confidential information to non-watch members unless absolutely sure that those persons are law-abiding citizens who have a legitimate need to know that information, and only then if it is for the good of the program. Members must not use any confidential information to their own or anyone else's personal or financial benefit.
3. Remember – the member's primary role is to **observe** and **report**. Functioning in this role is providing a valuable service to the Sheriff's Office and the citizens of Van Zandt County.
4. Members must understand that confrontation, questioning, and detention are law enforcement functions that must be left to sworn law enforcement officers. (Citizen Arrests should **NEVER** be attempted within the scope of this program.)
5. Members should become very familiar with their sector and, as much as possible, the people who live within its boundaries. Within the scope of their training and ability members should be willing to provide emergency assistance within the sector, precinct or county.
6. Members should strive to understand the crime prevention role and within that role ~~you~~ are encouraged to pass on non-confidential crime prevention and public safety information to other citizens and to try to recruit other participants in the PWP.
7. Members shall back away from a dangerous situation and **call 9-1-1 immediately** if they should ever find themselves even minimally, at-risk of physical harm. When making a 911 call members should identify themselves as a Precinct Watch member some time during the call, but the primary goal is to describe the nature of the call, answer the dispatcher's questions and follow their instructions.
8. Members must always work in pairs when functioning as a properly trained Precinct Watch patrol participant – **they must never ride alone on patrol**.
9. Remember, when seeking a better view or clearer picture of an observation no member has been granted permission to break trespass laws or violate anyone's privacy.
10. Members must always make observations from a safe distance on a public road, or a private road unless posted "do not enter".
11. At all times, when representing the Precinct Watch Program members must, avoid inappropriate conduct, comments, and conversations that reflect negatively on the PWP or that cause someone to perceive the member as anything other than a private citizen volunteer.
12. **MEMBERS MUST NOT CARRY HANDGUNS** without a proper CHL. While functioning on patrol members are not allowed, by PWP rules, to carry the handgun on their person, just in the vehicle. Zero tolerance for this rule and any violation will result in immediate removal from the program.

13. Members must not be under the influence of any alcohol or any other type of mood or mind altering substances and/or during any patrol or other PWP observation activities.
14. At no time, under any circumstances, while functioning under this program, shall a member chase or pursue any vehicle or individual or otherwise attempt to apprehend someone.
15. Members should always attempt to identify their role as a PWP member to authorities, and must never interfere or get in the way of the actions of law enforcement officers, or other emergency responders.
16. When involved in the observation of an incident members shall make sure to record all helpful information thoroughly and turn it over to responding officers or emergency response personnel. Taking detailed notes at incidents may later prove to be very helpful.
17. While functioning as a patrol participant, if there is an emergency need to call the Sheriff's Office, members should **always call 9-1-1** and follow the prescribed PWP protocol.
18. Members must never over-step their bounds by conducting any unapproved action(s), like attempting to patrol before being properly trained and certified to do so, or patrolling without proper coordination with their patrol coordinator, or any other actions for which they have not been given proper clearance. Training and scheduling for patrol will be handled by the precinct's Patrol Coordinator only and as much as practical should be coordinated with the Sheriff's Office Dispatch.
19. If a member becomes involved in a non-emergency situation that merits reporting to the Sheriff's Office, they should try to record as many basic details as possible on a notepad including: Date, time, location, people's names, any descriptions and any other pertinent details. Non-emergency calls shall be made to the general dispatch number (903-567-4133 ext. 0) where members will be directed to the proper responder.
20. To remain an active member in good standing members shall attempt to attend all scheduled precinct meetings of the PWP and when possible take part in other activities. Important information is disseminated at every meeting and if not present members miss out on the information.

The primary goal of the Precinct Watch Program is **Crime Prevention**. The program and all it represents acts as a deterrent to would-be criminals. The privilege of membership means that all members represent the entire membership with their actions and demeanor. Members who violate this code of conduct are misrepresenting the program and its members and stand the risk of losing their membership privilege.

Should any member of the PWP witness any violation of this Code of Conduct they should put the observation in writing and submit it to the Precinct Chairperson. The written statement must include the specific date, time and place of the alleged violation along with all of the pertinent facts as well as parties present who also witnessed the alleged violation. The reporting member shall not discuss the alleged violation with anyone other than the Precinct Chairperson until the alleged violation has been decided upon.

For consistency and fairness, there must be specific procedures for the handling of alleged Code of Conduct Violations. To accomplish that end, a set of Code of Conduct "Violation Review Procedures" (contained in a separate document) has been created. Under all circumstances where there is an alleged Code of Conduct violation the attached Violation Review Procedures must be followed.

CODE OF CONDUCT
VIOLATION REVIEW PROCEDURES

General:

1. When a member of the PWP reports the witnessing of a violation of this Code of Conduct they should do so by putting the observation in writing and submitting it to their Precinct Chairperson. The written statement must include the specific date, time and place of the alleged violation along with all of the pertinent facts as well as parties present who also witnessed the alleged violation. At this point the reporting member shall not discuss the alleged violation with anyone.
2. The precinct chairperson shall submit the alleged violation to the Chairperson of the PWA, unless the chairperson of the PWA is involved in the alleged violation, in such case the alleged violation shall be submitted to the next highest ranking officer of the PWA not involved in the alleged violation, i.e. Vice Chairperson or Secretary/Treasurer.

Preliminary Review:

1. Once a member of the PWP has been cited for one or more violations of the Code of Conduct it shall first be reviewed by the three officers of the PWA, provided none of those officers are involved in the alleged violation.
 - a. Should any of the PWA officers be involved in the alleged violation they shall not participate in the review and shall be replaced by an appointment of one or more of the precinct chairpersons. This appointment, coming from chairpersons based on the most longevity in the program, shall be made by the highest level PWA officer not involved in the alleged violation.
 - b. The highest ranking PWA officer shall be the presiding officer of this review panel.
 - c. Should all of the PWA officers be involved in the alleged violation the Sheriff shall appoint three precinct chairpersons as the review panel and the longest serving precinct chairperson shall preside.
2. The three member review panel will gather enough information to make a determination whether or not the alleged violation has a basis for further proceedings or is unfounded.
 - a. A list of everyone involved in the circumstances of the alleged violation shall be compiled. The persons on this list shall be contacted by phone by a member of the review panel. These witnesses shall be informed of the alleged violation and shall be interviewed about their knowledge of the facts of the alleged violation. Witnesses must swear to secrecy and should not be informed of any of the other witnesses in the review.
 - a. After reviewing the preliminary information the review panel shall vote by majority vote (two of three) whether or not the alleged violation is founded or unfounded based on the preliminary information. If for any reason a majority vote cannot be forthcoming then further proceedings procedures shall be followed.
 - b. If the review panel makes a finding that the alleged violation is unfounded, it must be based on the idea that there is no doubt that a violation has not occurred. If this is the case they will communicate that to the necessary parties, place their findings in writing and file that and any other documentation with the PWA Secretary/Treasurer.
 - c. Should the review panel make a finding that there is enough factual information to warrant further investigation and charges of a specific code of conduct violation(s) that finding must be based on the idea that there is no doubt that a violation has occurred. The panel shall then proceed to the next step of the **furthering** proceedings part of the process by first informing the member(s) in question that they are being charged with the alleged violation(s) and will be given a chance to explain their defense to that charge as part of further proceedings and in the event that disciplinary action is decided upon.
 - d. The member(s) in question shall be placed on temporary suspension and shall not take

place in any PWP activities until such time as released from the suspension.

Further Proceedings:

1. At this stage two new members (a total of five members) shall be added to the review panel to now become the code of conduct hearing panel charged with the full investigation, hearing and decision of actions to be taken. The two additional members shall come from the chairpersons or vice-chairpersons of precincts not involved in the alleged violation. All stages of further proceedings will be fully documented to include recorded meetings and testimony.
2. The persons on the witness list shall be re-contacted and asked to submit a complete and confidential statement of the facts of the alleged violation from their perspective. These witness statements must include all words and deeds that they were witness to as it relates to the alleged violation. Statements must include a minimum of names, dates, times, places and specific and complete circumstances as witnessed.
3. Once again all witnesses must swear to secrecy and should not be informed of any of the other witnesses in the investigation.
4. Once all facts have been gathered the hearing panel shall meet to review statements and other documentation as well as hear from witnesses if necessary. No one other than panel members shall be allowed to attend these meetings unless specifically invited. All hearing meetings will be audio recorded.
(Other than approved general emails and/or phone contacts, members of the hearing committee must not discuss anything about the investigation or any part of the process, outside called meetings, until the process has been completed. Additional phone contacts can be made to obtain additional information or clarification of statements, etc. Any additional contacts must be notated and included in the documentation.)
5. After all statements and evidence have been considered by the hearing panel there shall be a preliminary majority vote whether or not to discipline the member(s) up to and including removal from membership in the PWP. This is a preliminary vote pending testimony and evidence from the charged member.
6. Regardless of the outcome of the preliminary vote, the member(s) being charged will be given an opportunity to defend their position. The member(s) shall be contacted by the chairperson of the hearing panel and shall be told that they have the right to appear before the panel to show why no action should be taken.
7. At the subsequent meeting with the hearing panel the charged member(s) will once again be presented the charged code of conduct violation(s), to include any new charges that may have arisen and a brief summary of the facts that support the violation(s). The suspended member will be given every opportunity at this meeting to show cause why no disciplinary action should be taken. (Witnesses who gave statements may or may not be present at this hearing at the discretion of the hearing panel)
8. If the charged member(s) fails to appear, the hearing committee will immediately move to step 10 below.
9. Once the charged member(s) has appeared and offered their defense to the charges they will be asked to leave the room while the hearing panel discusses the information and rules whether or not disciplinary action should be taken. (The charged member, at their discretion, may wait outside the room for the results or may leave).
10. If disciplinary action is warranted, it shall be based on the seriousness of the code of conduct violation. Possible progressions of action from minor to major include but are not limited to: Counseling, Reprimand, Suspension, Dismissal or any combination of those.
11. Once a determination has been made and accepted by a clear majority of the hearing panel, it shall first be communicated by the PWP Chairperson to the charged member(s) prior to being communicated in any other fashion.
12. A complete file of the entire proceedings and voting results shall be turned over to the PWP

Secretary/Treasurer for storage.

Communications:

In order to help PWP members to maintain accountability of membership and the need to adhere to the code of conduct, without mentioning any names or precincts, an announcement should be made by the precinct chairpersons at each of the next four precinct monthly meetings describing the code of conduct violation(s) and any disciplinary actions taken.

If, as a result of an affirmative code of conduct violation, any member is dismissed from the program, the communication of that disciplinary action shall be limited, in that the general circumstances and their name shall be shared with the officers of each precinct so they can make sure that the dismissed member(s) is no longer participating in any way. But further communications of the circumstances will be unreported to outside sources.

It is extremely important that all members, who have been made aware of the dismissal action, understand that sometimes people's choices and actions are not illegal or immoral, but may be a violation of the PWP Code of Conduct. Therefore it shall be the responsibility of all members to avoid any public ridicule of the dismissed member at the risk of themselves being in violation of the code of conduct.

END OF DOCUMENT