On 6 March 1991, in keeping with the state government's 'Together Against Crime' strategy, the Education Department of South Australia and the South Australia Police Department—with the support of the Crime Prevention and Criminology Unit—launched a joint cooperative effort to protect valuable school community facilities. School Watch is a community awareness and crime prevention program which involves local communities in the protection of schools. Since school facilities are shared by the community, a shared responsibility for them is implied. By working together, public and private interests can support each other for the benefit of both.

The aims and format of School Watch closely resemble those of Neighbourhood Watch—which is considered to be the most successful crime prevention program ever undertaken in South Australia. School Watch aims to reduce crime directed at schools and has the following objectives:

- to encourage communication between local police, Education Department personnel and the community;
- to increase awareness amongst members of the school community of the benefits to be derived from taking preventive action against crimes directed against schools;
- to improve security management practices at school level; and
- to foster a spirit of community ownership and pride in schools.

A project team—consisting of a seconded teacher and a police officer—was formed in 1990 to plan and coordinate the implementation of all School Watch programs and to encourage community interest and involvement. A video, together with a range of signs, stickers, pamphlets and other highly visible community materials have also been produced. A pilot program was successfully put into practice in seven schools situated on four campuses in the northern Adelaide metropolitan area. Schools selected to participate in the pilot program had earlier attempted to
address the widespread problems of vandalism, theft and arson by developing a similar school watch concept. Key teachers were identified in each pilot school to coordinate the program at school level, and liaison was established with the local police, local government authority and local Member of Parliament. School Watch committees were established at each campus resulting in a considerable reduction of crime at these schools.

Membership of School Watch is voluntary. It is gradually being introduced in schools in South Australia according to factors such as the statistics of crime related to schools and demonstrated school and community desire to participate in the program.

Subject to their maturity, students at each level of schooling are invited to participate in School Watch. Parents are invited to participate since they have a vested interest in the maintenance of their children’s education facility and represent an extremely potent resource. Representatives from local government, local service groups and Neighbourhood Watch can also become involved.

The Education Department is committed to working in partnership with business, industry, trade unions and the wider community to prepare students for life beyond school. Private organisations have been offered the opportunity to support School Watch by providing financial sponsorship. Police, being at the forefront of the crime prevention movement, have also been invited to participate.

**Establishment of the School Watch Program**

Once a school council has decided to establish a School Watch program, the following procedure is followed:

1. Schools express their interest by making contact with the School Watch project team.
2. A school contact person is nominated.
3. Liaison is established with the local police, local government body and the local member of Parliament.
4. A series of meetings are conducted by the School Watch project team to explain the program and basic school security measures to students, staff, parents and members of the community.
5. All residents and community members within the local area receive an invitation to attend the meetings.
6. A letter signed by the Director-General of Education and the Police Commissioner expressing support and urging attendance at the meeting is provided and, if possible, the invitation is accompanied by a Mayoral letter of support.
7. Volunteers are invited to form a School Watch committee which operates as a committee of the school council and acts at the direction of the council.

8. Volunteer application forms are made available at each meeting for those members of the community offering themselves for selection as members of the School Watch committee.

9. The project team collects and processes all volunteer applications. Standard police screening procedures apply and confidentiality is assured.

10. A subsequent meeting of volunteers is held to establish a formal committee and to identify individual roles. The committee must not exceed ten members and must comprise the principal or another member of the school council so as to ensure plans are in keeping with school management responsibilities which are governed by the Acts and Regulations covering education and associated policies and instructions. It is desirable for the committee to consist of representatives of students attending the school, parents, staff and members of the local community including the local police.

The Responsibility of the School Watch Committee

The main responsibilities of the School Watch committee are:

- to generate awareness of the program and encourage cooperation;
- to canvass support of the local community by requesting assistance in reporting suspicious activities at the school; and
- to identify specific weaknesses in the school’s security system and develop strategies to overcome these weaknesses.

The role of the Education Department in School Watch is to support and assist in the development of improved security in schools, whilst the role of the Police Department is to support and assist communities in developing and sharing the responsibility of crime prevention.

The School Watch project team responds to queries from School Watch committees and provides assistance as required. A School Watch handbook explaining the program in detail is issued to all committee members together with a booklet of security hints to assist the school in improving its security management practices.

Safety of individuals is paramount and participants are urged not to place themselves in any danger and not to form vigilante groups. The parameters within which School Watch members may operate are stated in the handbook and participants are reminded not to exceed their authority. School Watch members must observe the curfew hours (midnight to 7 a.m.) unless
they carry written permission of the principal to be on the premises at that time. They have no
authority to request persons to leave the school premises unless they are a member of the
police force, an officer of the Education Department or of the teaching service, a member of
the school council, the principal or a person authorised by the Minister or principal to protect
school property. School Watch members have no power of arrest and are urged to report
trespassers to the police.

Results of the School Watch Program
In 1991 fourteen schools in South Australia have established, or are in the process of
establishing, School Watch. Response towards the program from students of all ages has
generally been positive with most students expressing anger and distress when their school is
affected. Attendance at community meetings has fluctuated and averages approximately
twenty people. Although this attendance level is a small proportion of the school community,
the high level of enthusiasm, motivation and determination of the volunteers has ensured the
success of the program at each school.

School Watch has resulted in benefits not only for South Australian schools but also
for local communities and the individuals in those communities. Crime directed at the schools
participating in the program has been significantly reduced with less disruption to educational
and community programs and consequently a reduction in replacement costs. The greatest
benefits are the social and personal benefits and these cannot be measured in monetary terms.
In areas where School Watch has been established, there has been a noticeable upsurge of
community spirit and pride. This has improved morale in areas where a sense of community
has sometimes been lacking. On a personal level, some individuals have perceived a sense of
empowerment by greater involvement in the development of community programs.

Conclusion
School Watch does not profess to be the panacea for all school security problems but it is
proving itself to be an effective crime prevention measure, particularly when developed as
part of an overall security framework. It offers an opportunity for everyone to accept their
responsibility towards crime prevention and allows individuals to select their own level of
involvement.

Community bonds are strengthened by students working together with adults, and
School Watch helps instil in young people respect for public property and a community-
mined attitude. It is this attitude which may, in the future, produce the greatest and most far-
reaching benefits of the School Watch Program.

Postscript
By December 1992, more than 100 schools had joined School Watch.