

Reporting Drug Activity in Burlington, VT

The Old North End Neighborhood Safety Team's (ONE NeST) Guide to How to Report Drug Activity

Q: How do I know if it's drug activity?

A: While you can never be 100% sure that drug activity is taking place, these are common indicators of that activity (from *The Suburban Police Anti-Crime Network*):

- An unusually large amount of traffic contacting a building -- cars, taxis, or people walking -- often at strange hours. Visitors may sometimes pound on doors or shout to be let in. This traffic is usually quick with people staying only a short time. Sometimes they don't go in at all; instead, someone comes out to meet them.
- Finding drugs or drug paraphernalia (syringes, pipes, etc.) in the area.
- Repeated, observable exchanges of items, especially where money is visible.
- Offers to sell you drugs, or conversations about drugs that you overhear.

Q: What information should I collect?

A: Any information you have is helpful. If possible, collect:

- The location of the incident.
- Description of the people involved.
- Description of any vehicles involved, including license plate numbers.
- Time of day of the incident.
- The details of the transaction or other suspicious behavior you see.

Q: Whom do I report it to?

A: To report suspicious activity or drug related activity call the police department's main line at (802) 658-2704 and dial 0, or call the Drug Tip Line at (802) 540-2420 and leave a message. To talk to the narcotics unit directly, contact Det. Sgt. Justin Couture at 802-540-2232 or at jcouture@bpdvt.org. You can also report to any officer you see. The information will be transferred to the narcotics unit.

Q: What will happen to the information when I report it?

A: Reporting drug activity to the Burlington Police Department is important. All the reports they receive are used to map crime in the city and help allocate resources to address that crime. Your information could also be the piece that helps to complete a case against a drug dealer or distributor.

If you call the main line, you will be connected to a dispatcher who will take your contact information and the details of your report. An officer will then be sent out to investigate your report. If you call the drug tip line, you will reach a voicemail system and can leave a message with your report either anonymously or you can leave your contact information and request a follow up.

If you see drug activity happening and want an officer to address the problem immediately, call the main line. If you have information about previous activity and don't need an immediate action, call the drug tip line. The tip line is only checked by the police department once a day, Monday through Friday.

Q: What can I expect for follow up?

A: Drug investigations are slow, methodical processes. The fastest an investigation concludes is in a week and a half and can take six months to a year to complete. The average length of investigation is two to three months. If the federal government becomes involved, investigations can stretch to over a year. Police are working to make the best possible case and to protect informants.

If you call the main line and give a report to a dispatcher, an officer will follow up with you either by phone or by coming to your residence. You can request how you'd like to be contacted and if you'd prefer an officer didn't come to your home, you can request that they meet you somewhere else. All of the information you give the officer will be shared with the narcotics unit, who will add it to existing cases they are working on, or open a new investigation if this particular activity hasn't been reported before.

If you call the drug tip line and do not request a call back, you will not receive any follow up. The report you leave will be shared with the narcotics unit and added to any existing cases or help open a new case, just as if you had reported it directly to an officer.

If you continue to see activity, continue to report it. If you see a change in the pattern of activity, report that change. Encourage your neighbors who are affected by the activity to report as well. Arrests usually cannot be made based solely on a citizen report. There are strict legal standards for arrest, and courts will not accept a citizen report as cause for arrest unless that citizen has special training or experience with drugs or drug users. Officers who do have the training and experience must make their own observations and collect evidence the courts will accept.

Q: Will my safety be at risk for reporting?

A: If you are concerned about your safety, there are a number of ways to address it. First, you can report anonymously, though those reports can be less impactful during prosecution. You are in control of how, when, and where you report, so if you feel that you will be at-risk of retaliation if an officer comes to your home, you can request that an officer only contact you by phone, meet you some place other than your residence, or you can go to the police department to file the report.

Q: How to I maintain my quality of life during an investigation?

A: Having drug activity in your neighborhood can be frightening and difficult.

- Be as patient as possible.
- Provide as much information as possible.
- Do not engage or provoke the person in question.
- Help prevent crime through environmental design by installing motion detector lights, keeping all shrubs near entryways low and trimmed, keeping doors and windows locked, and adding locks to backyard access gates.

Q: What can my neighbors and I do to make our neighborhood safe and drug-free?

A: The best deterrent to drug activity is a strong, connected neighborhood. Introduce yourself to your neighbors, maintain your property, and help others maintain theirs.