

# SAFETY ESSENTIALS

## BEWARE OF “BROKEN WINDOWS”

- ✓ Little problems lead to bigger ones. The little things that make a park seem uncared for and dangerous—graffiti, trash, broken glass, unleashed pit bulls, people drinking, misbehaving or playing very loud music—create an atmosphere in which crime flourishes.
- ✓ Report vandalism and help to keep the park clean. Remember that “quality of life” rules are more important than they seem, and need to be enforced.

## BRING PEOPLE BACK

- ✓ Use good activities to drive out bad activities. If people are too scared to come into the park on their own, organize festivals, events, picnics, tournaments, spruce-ups—whatever it takes—to bring them back.
- ✓ One activity alone won't do it. But if you work steadily, week in and week out, to create a critical mass of positive activities in the park, you *will* reach the “tipping point” and the park *will* come back.

## CROWD OUT CRIME

- ✓ A successful, vital park repels the criminal element, which thrives in darkness and anonymity. Anything you can do to bring people into the park is a step towards making your park safer.
- ✓ Events of all sizes, from clean-ups to international festivals, serve dual purposes: they drive out those who are misusing your park and convince the community that the park is a place for fun, not danger.

## DISCOURAGE NEGATIVE ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Make problem users feel unwanted. One parks group in Manhattan hung a banner in their park that said, “Drug Dealers Keep Out!” A group in the Bronx “staked out” their park by eating their breakfast at a visible spot every morning. That same group would politely, non-threateningly, clean up the trash around the feet of pot-smoking teenagers that had become a problem.
- ✓ Don't let problems fester. Contact your local park supervisor or manager as soon as you see trash, broken glass, or graffiti. However, you don't have to wait to do something—sometimes you can address a problem yourself faster than Parks can.

## BE PATIENT, REACHING THE “TIPPING POINT” TAKES TIME

- ✓ It can take time and lots of hard work before a park that has been abandoned reaches the “tipping point,” where it shifts from being frightening and dangerous to safe and full of life.
- ✓ At some point, there will be a critical mass of positive activity, and the “feel” of the park will shift. Don't give up if it doesn't happen right away.

## DON'T PUT YOURSELF IN DANGER

- ✓ Drug dealers and other criminals who inhabit your park can be dangerous.
- ✓ Do not unnecessarily risk your safety by confronting them directly. There are many other effective strategies for making your park safer.

## **DON'T GO IT ALONE**

- ✓ Your police precinct is your most important resource for fighting crime, but developing relationships with them takes time and work.
- ✓ Get to know the beat cops, your precinct's community affairs officer, and your precinct commander. Go to the monthly meeting of your local Police Precinct Community Council, and let them know about the issues that matter to you.
- ✓ **Be the "eyes and ears" of the police.** Neither the police nor the Parks Enforcement Patrol can be in your park all the time. You can help by reporting any problems you see. The more you report problems, the more likely the police are to help you, as their distribution of resources is determined by the number of complaints they receive. You should also report problems to Parks by calling **311**, the City's information line, at any time.
- ✓ **Be specific about the problems.** Look for patterns and report them. Is there a particular time when kids are hanging out, when people are selling or using drugs, when the dealers walk their pitbulls; are there "regulars" who make trouble? More details make it easier for police and PEP to focus on the problem people, times and places.
- ✓ **Get on the agenda.** Go to the monthly meeting of your local Police Precinct Community Council. Bring others with you, and go to every meeting. There's no better way for the Police to know about the issues that matter to you. Also attend meetings of the parks committee of your Community Board, and of local block, tenants, and merchants associations. Don't forget elected officials, too.
- ✓ **Think about organizing a safety committee/patrol.** When done properly, having a group focused on safety issues and/or a patrol can be a good supplement to the work of PEP and the police. But it must be done carefully, and in full consultation with PEP and the Police, if it is to be successful and appropriate.