

REALTOR® SAFETY GUIDE

Summary of Basic Safety Practices

- Identify the person you are working with before you join him or her alone, in a car or a house. Preferably meet them at your office, copy his or her driver's license and make sure someone from your office knows where you'll be going with the person.
- Always carry your cell phone with you and make sure it is fully charged and has reception. Program 911 into speed dial and don't hesitate to call for help.
- Trust your instincts. If you have a bad feeling, don't second-guess what it's telling you. Listen to your gut feeling and protect yourself.

Twelve General Safety Tips

Safety Tip #1 - Know Who You Are Dealing With When You Have New Clients or Customers:

- Meet them at your office
- Complete the Client/Customer Identification Form

Ask the prospect to stop by your office so you can complete the Client/Customer Identification Form (in this guide) before going to a property. This information should be openly obtained, preferably in the presence of an associate. Be sure to retain the information at your office and make sure the client or customer knows that others in your office will know their name, address and other personal information. This may discourage an assailant.

If you can't get them to come into the office first, decide if you still want to work with them, err on the side of caution. Let someone in your office know with whom you are meeting with and the location and time of your meeting. When the client or customer arrives at the property, jot down the make, model, color and license number of their car and phone your office with this information before you proceed.
- Photocopy or scan their driver's license

Legitimate clients do not mind you copying their driver's license. We freely show our license to the clerk at the grocery store when we write a check and show our ID to rent a movie. It is reasonable to expect identification from a prospective client before we show a home worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.
- Get their car description and license number
- Verify his/her identity

This may entail calling references, his/her place of employment, and verifying their current address. You could also log on to the Pennsylvania State Police Website at www.psp.state.pa.us and do a registered sex offender search if you are suspicious of certain activity.
- Introduce the prospect to someone in the office

A would-be assailant does not like to be noticed by others, knowing such persons could pick him or her out of a police lineup.

Safety Tip #2 - Tell Someone

- Who you are with
Make sure you tell someone where you are going, who you are going with and when you will be back. Whenever possible, make sure the client knows you have shared this information with someone. You are less likely to be attacked if the criminal knows you will be missed and he or she can be identified.
- Where you are going
When possible, using the Agent Itinerary Form is a great way to communicate with the office staff (in this guide) if your client is with you as you leave the office, make a show of sharing this information with someone.

If something does happen to you, the information found on your itinerary form will assist police in finding you. Victims of crimes can be missing for days before coworkers begin to worry, unless we tell them when to expect us back.
- When you will be back
If you work alone, consider telling your "buddy", a family member or your answering service when to expect you back. Even leaving behind a note on your desk could help the authorities find you in an emergency situation.

Safety Tip #3 - Keep a Cell Phone at Your Side

- Program emergency numbers into speed dial including 911, emergency road service, your office and your buddy and your family members.
- Keep your cell phone fully charged.
- Carry your cell phone with you at all times.
- Keep a cell phone-charging adaptor in your car for emergency situations.
- Try and call the office once an hour to let people know where you are.
- Create and share a distress signal with people in the office.
- If you have an emergency situation and call 911, stay on the line and do not hang up.
- Rehearse in your own mind how you would react to an emergency situation such as a mugging or physical attack. Know when you will fight back, when you will run and when you will have an opportunity to call 911 for assistance.

Safety Tip #4 - Conduct a Safe Open House

- Don't advertise a listing as vacant.
- Arrive early and establish escape routes from each level of the house.
- Avoid attics, basements and getting trapped in small rooms. Always let prospective clients lead the way into rooms, while you stay close to the door.
- Call the office or a buddy hourly.
- Keep your keys and cell phone with you.
- Park where you can get out quickly.
- Notify neighbors in advance or, if time permits, introduce yourself to the neighbors and let them know when you will be showing a house. They will be more alert to unusual sounds and you will have somewhere to run to if you need help.

- Remind sellers to put valuables in a safe, secure place. Do not leave your briefcase, purse or laptop sitting on a counter. Remember, that a nice looking couple could actually have other motives besides seeing the property. Thieves often work in teams; while one is keeping you occupied, the other is stealing whatever they can.
- Be aware of suspicious behavior and your surroundings.
- Place one of your business cards, with the date and time on the back, and place it in a kitchen cupboard.
- When prospects begin arriving at the open house, jot down their car description, license number and a physical description of each person. This will assist you in remembering names as well.

Safety Tip #5 - Have a Distress Code

- Have a prearranged distress signal: "I'm at the Jones house at (address) and I need the red file right away."

You may be in a situation where you think you might need help; you can use the phone, but the person you are with can overhear the conversation and you do not want to alarm him or her. This is where a prearranged distress code, "red file" can help.

The distress code should be used if you are uneasy, but do not feel you are in danger. If you are in immediate danger - stop the car and leave the area, or jump out of the car at the next stop. Do not hesitate to call 911.

- Authorities agree that most rapists and thieves are looking for easy targets. Be assertive and leave a dangerous situation early, but have a distress code for times you feel uneasy.
- Share and practice your distress code with your office, colleagues, family and friends.

Safety Tip #6 - Don't Make Personal Marketing Too Personal

- Your marketing materials should be polished and professional.
- Concentrate on your professional proficiency rather than personal information in newspapers, resumes, on business cards and websites.
- Limit the amount of personal information you share. Giving out too much of the wrong information can make you a target.
- Use your cell number, not your home phone number.
- Use your office address rather than your home address.
- Avoid using glamour shots in your personal marketing - your personal safety is too important. Criminals have been known to circle photographs of their would-be victims in newspaper advertisements and home magazines. These victims were targeted because of their appearance in the photograph.

Safety Tip #7 - Be a Buddy

Know in advance whom you are going to call when:

- Your instincts tell you to get help
- You're just a little nervous
- You need help at an open house.

Safety Tip #8 - Dress for Safety

- Don't wear expensive jewelry. Expensive jewelry can make you a target.
- Always wear your cell phone.
- Dress for the weather.
- Only carry the cash or credit cards you need.
- Your image is important, so dress professionally. However, dress for safety as well.
- Don't wear shoes that will hamper your ability to move quickly if necessary!

Safety Tip #9 - Danger is Not Always Easy to Identify

These are signals that something isn't right!

- Gut feelings
- Hesitation
- Unexplained fear
- Apprehension

Listen to your gut feeling and protect yourself.

Safety experts agree that it is best to assume that your instincts are right and to take the necessary precautions. Do not be so anxious for a sale that you ignore your own intuition in the heat of the moment. Use these same instincts before you give out your phone number or address, and especially before getting in the car with a new client.

Safety Tip #10 - Practice Car Safety

- Always have your keys with you
- Keep car doors locked at all times
 - When you are alone, the first thing you should do when you get into your car is lock the doors. Be observant when approaching your car, looking underneath and in the back seat before you get in.
- Park in a well-lit area
- Don't get blocked in
- Beware of dead-end streets
 - As you park your car, take in your surroundings and ask yourself: In an emergency, am I going to be able to run to my car and drive away? You won't be able to if you are blocked in. Park on the street whenever possible.
- Keep your car in good running condition
 - Make sure you have a full tank of gas and a fully charged cell phone. Keep tools, blankets, flares, first aid kit and warm clothes in the trunk of your car.
- Consider using separate cars
 - When working with a client or customer, take separate cars whenever possible. If you must take one car, you drive!
- Keep a spare key hidden somewhere on the outside of your car, just in case you cannot get to your main set of keys. A strong magnet key holder works well for this.

- Using a cell phone while driving can cause an accident. For driving safety, purchase a hands-free phone kit for your car. And never attempt to take notes while driving - pull over and stop in a safe place first.
- Consider a keyless entry system and global positioning system (GPS) such as "On Star" for your next car.
- Make sure all doors are locked when you are driving.
- Secure valuables out of sight.
- Use the buddy system or arrange for a security service or police escort if you transport cash deposits.

Safety Tip #11 - Let Them Lead the Way

- Be aware of possible escape routes
- Leave doors open
- Be wary in attics and basements
- Walk behind your clients
- When you show a house, be aware of possible escape routes and leave all doors open.

Safety Tip #12 - Fight or Flight?

- Yell "fire" to get attention
- Select the response that fits the situation
- Run and call 911 when you can
- Take a self-defense training course
- If you strike, mean it

Remember that the primary goal in any incident is to escape from the danger and call for help. Try to find a discreet way of removing yourself from the situation, such as saying you need to step outside to make a phone call and then not going back inside.

If an attack does occur, trust yourself and stay as calm as possible. Think rationally and evaluate your options. There is no one right way to respond to a confrontation, because each situation is different. The response depends on the circumstances: location of the attack, your personal resources, the characteristics of the assailant and the presence of weapons. There are many strategies that are effective, but you must rely on your own judgment to choose the best one:

Possible Responses to an Attack

- **No resistance** - Not resisting might be the proper choice in a given situation. An attacker with a gun or a knife may put you in a situation where you think it is safer to do what he or she says. If someone tries to rob you give up your property - don't give up your life.
- **Stalling for time** - Appear to go along with the attacker. This might give you time to assess the situation. When his or her guard is down, try to escape. This worked for one N.C. victim who treated her attacker as politely as possible while telling him she wouldn't report the attack to the police.

- **Distraction and then flight** - Obviously you should try to get away - but whether you can depends on your shoes, clothing, your physical stamina, the terrain and how close your attacker is.
- **Verbal assertiveness** - If someone is coming toward you, hold out your hands in front of you and yell, "Stop" or "Stay Back!" Several criminals interviewed said they'd leave a woman alone if she yelled or showed that she was not afraid to fight back.
- **Physical resistance** - If you decide to respond physically, remember that your first priority is to get away. Act quickly and decisively to throw the attacker off guard while you escape.

Office Procedures

Recommended is the use of three forms at all real estate offices, regardless of size. The forms were developed by agents, for agents, after consulting law enforcement officials for their input. The purpose of these forms is:

- To deter assaults by positively identifying the people we are working with
- To have emergency information for everyone in the real estate office
- If a crime occurs, to know where the agent was going so the police can help
- To identify every client wanting to meet with an agent

Client/Customer Identification Form

Know whom you are doing business with! Offices across the nation are now asking for photo identification and information from clients before going to view property. The form is quick and easy to fill out and asks for name, address, employer and automobile information. Not only does this procedure identify the person you are working with, it helps qualify a prospect and aids police if something does happen to you. This simple form might just be the best preventative safety measure you and your office can take.

We have found that clients and customers are very understanding of why we need this information. There has been little or no resistance to providing the identification. If a client or customer does object, that in itself should raise a red flag.

Agent Personal Information Form

If there was an accident or an agent did not check in when they were scheduled to, you or the police would need information quickly. We recommend placing the Agent Personal Information Forms collectively in a separate folder that anyone can access. This information should be updated at least once a year.

Agent Itinerary Form

This simple form helps you find an agent when there is an emergency and give you a place to look when an agent is missing. Many agents print out an additional "show list" and attach the form to it. Your front office staff will appreciate having this information if they need to contact an agent. Also, consider having a system for following up when agents don't return or call the office in a timely manner.

Limit Unauthorized Access

Offices should consider an inexpensive single door access control system that prohibits unauthorized persons from entering sales and administrative offices.

CLIENT/CUSTOMER IDENTIFICATION FORM

This information is requested in the interest of protecting the safety and security of property owners and our agents. We appreciate your consideration and cooperation. All security information is confidential and will not be sold or used for solicitation purposes.

This information may be subject to verification. Form should be kept in branch office.

Agent Name: _____

Date: _____

CUSTOMER/CLIENT INFORMATION:

Name (s) _____

Home Address: _____

Home Phone Number: _____ Business Phone Number _____

LOCAL CONTACT INFORMATION: (If from out of town)

Local contact phone number: _____

Local address: _____

I (we) can be contacted at this location until: _____

EMPLOYER INFORMATION:

Employer: _____ Phone: _____

AUTOMOBILE INFORMATION:

Make and Model: _____ Color: _____

Owner: _____

License Number: _____ State: _____

Photocopy Driver's License(s) or other Photo ID(s) in this space:

AGENT PERSONAL INFORMATION FORM

Name: _____ Updated: _____

Home Address: _____

CONTACT NUMBERS: (Include area codes)

Cell: _____ Home: _____

Pager: _____ Home Office: _____

Other: _____

EMERGENCY CONTACTS: (Provide at least one)

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Phone(s): _____

AUTO (List your most frequently used auto first.)

Make and Model: _____ Color: _____

Owner: _____

License Number: _____ State: _____

Second Auto:

Make and Model: _____ Color: _____

Owner: _____

License Number: _____ State: _____

Medical Information:

Primary Physician: _____ Phone Number: _____

Special Medications and Conditions: _____

Note: Keep a record of your major credit card information in a safe, accessible place in case of an emergency, loss or theft of cards.

AGENT ITINERARY FORM

This form is designed for your safety and security. Please leave the completed form with the receptionist, along with your showing itinerary information.

Agent: _____

Date: _____

Customer/Client Name (s): _____

Client/Customer Identification Form attached. ____ Yes ____ No

Client/Customer Identification Form already on file with: _____

Anticipated Time of Return to the Office: _____ AM _____ PM

Will Call the Office by this time: _____ AM _____ PM

My contact phone while showing property: _____

Comments: _____

