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SELLING: Safety

BY LESLIE CUMMINGS

Protect your life

On a daily basis, in the bustle of appointments and commitments, it's easy to become complacent about your safety. But because of the potentially dangerous situations real estate practitioners find themselves in each day—vacant homes, open houses, chauffeuring strangers to showings—it's imperative to put a premium on precaution.

The numbers should make you pause: According to a May 2003 National Association of REALTORS® survey, one out of four REALTORS® say they've been involved in a safety incident on the job. And the National Safety Council reports that six real estate practitioners lost their life on the job in 2001, the last year for which stats are available.

The first rule in danger prevention: "Have a safety plan for every situation you enter," says Joe Rosner, director of Best Defense of Illinois, a Woodstock-based company that teaches strategies and techniques to avoid being victimized by criminals.

Among the precautions to take right away:

- Tell coworkers or family when, where, and with whom your appointments will be and when you expect to return.
- Keep your photograph, car model and license plate number, driver's license number, name of emergency contact, and medical data in a place family and coworkers know.
- Ask your broker to create a coded distress signal for your office. If you're in a potentially dangerous situation, you can call in an alert to your office by saying something like, "This is Jane. I'm at 123 Main St. Could you please send over the red file?"
- List only your office, pager, or cell phone numbers—not your home number—on your business card.
- Dress conservatively. Don't wear flashy or expensive jewelry.
- Take a self-defense course. To find one, contact your local police department. You can also organize one for your entire office.

A key, and often overlooked, way to protect yourself is to trust your intuition. "We have instincts, but then we tell ourselves, 'I'm being foolish,'" Rosner says. For example, if you see someone sitting in a van outside the property you're showing, you should be able to come up with some plausible guesses—it's the neighbor's exterminator—as to what the person is doing in the area, he says. When you can't, be

especially vigilant.

What else might trigger your suspicions? Take special care if someone

- Is preoccupied with art, electronics, medicine cabinets (drugs), or other contents of a house and examines windows, locks, or alarm systems.
- Expresses personal interest in you, initiates conversation unrelated to the home, or engages in lengthy conversation
- Exhibits body language that suggests something is wrong (dilated eyes, labored breathing, nervous movement, inappropriate laughter)

There are also numerous precautions you can take in the field. For showings:

- Meet first-time prospects at your office before showing them property. Introduce them to at least two other people, and make it a company policy to ask all prospects for identification.
- Take your own car, and ask buyers to follow you in theirs. Lock your car when entering or leaving it, and keep your keys in hand when walking to or from your car, so you can quickly get into a property or back into the car.
- Affix your business card to a kitchen cabinet, so the seller will know you were there should you be reported missing.

To protect yourself during open houses:

- Tell neighbors you're in the property, leave them your business card and cell phone number, and ask them to report suspicious activity to police.
- Ask a coworker to accompany you.
- Have an escape route. Carry a doorstop with you to prop open your exit.
- Post a sign stating, "Identification required." Be sure to ask to see the ID of every visitor to the open house. Exceptions could put you at risk of violating fair housing law.
- Stow your valuables out of sight.
- If a visitor acts suspiciously, let the person know someone else will be stopping by at any time.
- Identify places you could be trapped—bedrooms, bathrooms, and laundry rooms. Follow behind buyers as they explore a home. Always position yourself between the buyer and the way out.
- Don't park your car in the driveway where it could be blocked in.

To encourage prevention, NAR has designated Sept. 14–20 as REALTOR® Safety Week. The association recently sent safety kits, containing tips and a video, to state and local associations to encourage them to offer safety programs to members.

By improving your vigilance and mapping out a game plan, you'll not only avoid attacks but also be more confident. And with confidence you're less of a target.

Safety products suited to your job

Jet Scream Whistle. Loud whistle draws attention when you need help. \$8.50. www.besafeinc.com, 888/990-7233.

- **Mobile Callback.** System calls your cell phone at pre-set intervals to ensure you're safe. Activation fee, \$50; monthly fee, \$21.95; 10 percent discount for NAR members. <http://mobilecallback.com>, 866/756-7233.
- **The Mugger Slugger.** Pepper spray that shoots up to eight feet. \$30; \$25 for real estate practitioners. Protective Concepts Inc., 800/926-1625.
- **Personal Alarm.** Warning siren alerts people you need help. \$7.95-\$38.95. www.selfdefence.com, 540/622-2848.
- **Safeshow Adaptor Unit.** Attach this combination flashlight and pepper spray unit to your Supra electronic lockbox or use it separately. \$29.95 for lockbox adaptor unit; \$24.95 for keychain unit. www.safeshow.com, 877/935-3520.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

For safety ideas and resources, click the links below.

[Field guide to REALTOR® safety](#)

[REALTOR® Safety Week](#)

[REALTOR® Magazine Prepackaged Sales Meeting on Safety*](#)

[Don't Be a Victim: Personal Safety for REALTORS®](#)

[NAR Library's Field Guide to REALTOR® Safety](#)

[12 safety posters](#), developed by the Washington Association of REALTORS®' Real Estate Safety Council



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