

STAY ALERT. STAY SAFE.

TIPS & TOOLS FOR PERSONAL SAFETY ON THE JOB

For most Realtors®, being in the public eye is part of the job description. Every day, they openly share contact information, meet unknown clients, and walk through vacant properties. This puts them in a uniquely vulnerable position that most working professionals never experience. According to a report from the National Association of Realtors® (NAR), nearly 70% of Realtors® have worried about their personal safety while doing their jobs. Some recent headlines have rightfully increased that fear factor.

In late December 2019, Realtor® Monique Baugh was lured to a Minneapolis location where she was abducted and murdered. The year before, Steven Wilson, a marketing representative for Ryan Homes in Hanover, Maryland, was found brutally beaten to death at the model home where he had been working. A few years earlier in Scott, Arkansas, Realtor® Beverly Carter was kidnapped while showing a home and then killed. While incidents like this are rare, Realtors® need to be vigilant and smart about how and where they interact with clients.

“We Realtors® are particularly vulnerable because we publicize a lot of personal information in the course of doing business,” said Tracie Fogelson, a Realtor® and broker at Counselor Realty of Rochester who helps real estate professionals increase their personal safety. “We post our picture, cell phone, email, and our work address. We post the open house where we’re going to be Saturday afternoon from 2 to 4 pm. Anyone looking at pictures of that house online can see the layout and tell whether it’s vacant. For predators, it’s a trove of information they can use against you.”

As frightening as this sounds, Fogelson says Realtors® can do a lot of things to prevent the possibility of assault. It all begins with the very first client interaction. The fact that most of these encounters now happen on a Zoom call instead of an in-person meeting adds an additional layer of safety, she says.

“This first meeting is a credentialing process where you get to know the client,” Fogelson said. “You find out if they’ve met with a lender and have a pre-approval letter. You discuss whether they have a property to sell. You see if they have the resources to make a viable offer. You go over COVID-19 protocols for showing homes. If they’re willing to sit through a half-hour presentation on all of these things, and if they’ve done their due diligence with a lender, it shows that they’re motivated and serious. So, it’s a pretty good bet that they are legitimate customers.”

If your meeting leaves you feeling uncertain, don’t hesitate to take advantage of free, online resources for learning more about your clients. Fogelson says social media is a good place to start. You can also check for involvement in criminal cases or sex offender status at these websites administered by the state of Minnesota:

- MN Dept. of Corrections – Offender Search Criteria: coms.doc.state.mn.us/PublicViewer
- Minnesota Judicial Branch – Access Case Records: mncourts.gov/access-case-records.aspx

Realtors® should be very careful to use this information in strict compliance with Fair Housing laws, particularly those concerning disparate impact. Of course, even if everything checks out, you shouldn't let down your guard when you start touring homes with your new clients. Fogelson notes it's important people pay attention to their environment and take small but critical measures to prevent assault.

“Always be situationally aware of where you are and what you are doing,” Fogelson said. She recommends five practical, easy tactics for avoiding trouble and escaping from a potentially dangerous situation.

FIVE WAYS REALTORS® CAN STAY SAFE

- 1 Don't park your car in the driveway**
Park on the street where another vehicle cannot block you in.
- 2 Never enter a room before the client**
When escorting clients through a home, always have them enter rooms or staircases before you. That way you're not trapped in an area where they're controlling the exit.
- 3 Make sure someone knows where you are**
Tell someone you know and trust about your itinerary. Give them addresses and times for those appointments. As an added precaution, you can ask that person to periodically check in with you.
- 4 Don't go solo to open houses**
Try to make sure you're always with another professional at open houses.
- 5 Activate emergency features on your smartphone**
If you have an iPhone, activate the Emergency SOS feature in Settings. Other smartphones have similar features. Be sure to check the manufacturer's website for all the details on its emergency features.

A WORD ON WEAPONS

Although many Realtors® carry personal safety devices like mace, pepper spray, and guns, Fogelson counsels caution in using them. You may find yourself in a situation where the predator can overpower you. Consider the possibility that your protective item could be taken and used against you.”

There's also a legal dimension to consider. There are strict rules about discharging weapons, even in self-defense, observes Fogelson, who is licensed to carry a firearm.

“If you fire that weapon and you injure someone or worse, you will be arrested and go through the legal process,” she said. “You can never use your weapon over personal property. It has to be a personal safety issue. And you'll need a lawyer to help prove that.”

SAFETY STARTS WITH AWARENESS

The golden rule of safety is be aware of your surroundings. “Listen to your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, don't dismiss that. Act before you're in a situation where you have to take a more drastic measure,” Fogelson said. “Most of all, educate yourself about safety, take advantage of resources to check out your clients ahead of time, and make a plan for how to conduct yourself in every situation. A little effort up front can prevent a lot of trouble down the road.”



To learn more about ways to improve your personal safety and security, check out **56 Safety Tips for Realtors®** on [NAR's site](#).