



Personal Safety Guide

Be on the
SAFE
SIDE

preface

and dedication

In a National Association of REALTORS story, Timothy Dougherty writes of Maria Garcia, a New York real estate agent who was showing a house in Brentwood N.Y. in 1995 when Donny Bates, a paroled convict with a history of mental illness, approached her with interest in listing his house for sale. Instead of meeting Bates in her office she went alone with a stranger to a strange house. Bates slit her throat with a knife.

Incidents like this don't just happen in New York – and they don't only happen to women.

Mike Emert

In January 2001, Mike Emert, a Bellevue based real estate agent and a young family man, was also brutally killed with a knife. Although Mike apparently put up a struggle, he died of multiple stab wounds in the home he was showing. Mike's death shocked the citizens of the Northwest and galvanized the support of his co-workers and the entire real estate community.

Mike's tragic death inspired the formation of the Real Estate Safety Council. This non-profit group organized the production and distribution of this brochure, safety posters, and a website dedicated as a safety information resource. In addition, the Council is assisting the National Association of REALTORS in it's efforts to produce a safety video that can be made available to all real estate professionals.

As we reflect on Mike's death, and all the attacks on women and men in the real estate industry, we hope and pray these safety tips will prevent future incidents.



Real Estate Safety Council



In loving memory...

Michael A. Emert

1960 - 2001

Michael was murdered in the house he was showing in Woodinville, Washington on January 4, 2001. This tragedy inspired the formation of the Washington Real Estate Safety Council.

table of contents

Preface	2
Introduction	4
Acknowledgments	5

Safety Tip Posters

Know who you are dealing with	6
Tell someone	7
Keep a cell phone at your side	8
Open house safety tips	9
Have a distress code	10
Personal marketing	11
Be a buddy	12
Dress for safety	13
Danger is not always easy to identify	14
Car safety	15
Let them lead the way	16
Fight or Flight	17

Office Procedures

Overview	18
Customer identification form	19
Agent identification form	20
Additional resources	21

Real estate safety introduction

21 real estate professionals...

Twenty-one real estate professionals were murdered while on the job in the United States In 2000. A total of 206 agents died as a result of violent assaults from 1982 to 2000. Many more were raped, beaten and robbed.

These are alarming statistics, and we use them to illustrate the importance of taking safety precautions in your work. The very nature of showing real estate can be risky, for both men and women. You can reduce your exposure to assault by following some common sense safety tips we have compiled from crime victims and other real estate associations from across the country.

In researching the hundreds of articles and news stories written about this subject, we found in nearly every assault the victim could have done something to prevent the incident. Survivors tell us what they would have done differently if they were given the chance. In most cases, doing the following three things could have made a difference. These are things you can do on your own, even if your office does not have a formal safety program:

- 1. Identify the person you are working with before you join him/her alone, in a car or a house. Copy his/her driver's license!**
- 2. Always carry your cell phone, program 911 into speed dial, and don't hesitate to call for help.**
- 3. Trust your instincts.**

Safety Program

The Real Estate Safety Council encourages every office to implement a formal safety program. Each company should implement procedures and education programs that include everyone in the office. This booklet is intended as a resource for designing your safety program.

The safety tips are divided into 12 sections to facilitate a different discussion topic each month. Posters were developed for each topic and a "set" of 12 posters were sent to each Broker-Office in the state. Each month, you can post a poster and use this booklet as an outline for discussion although, we have found discussion happens spontaneously when the topic is safety. You will come up with safety tips and precautions yourself during these discussions. Please share these tips with us so we can pass them on to fellow real estate professionals.

A very special thank-you!

To the members of the Washington Real Estate Safety Council, a special thanks for your vision, your volunteered time and resources that have supported the various Safety Council projects to date.

Washington Real Estate Safety Council

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Know Who you are dealing with

WHEN YOU HAVE NEW CLIENTS:

Meet them in the office

Verify his/her identity

Get their car make and license number

Photocopy their driver's license

Complete the Client I.D. Form

ASK PROSPECT TO STOP BY YOUR OFFICE

and complete the personal identification form before going to a property. This should be openly obtained, preferably in the presence of an associate.

VERIFY THEIR IDENTITY

This may entail calling references, his/her place of employment and verifying his/her current address. Information should be retained at your office; knowing that a name and address are known may discourage an assailant.

GET THEIR CAR MAKE AND LICENSE NUMBER

It's easy to do, and it will assist police in catching a criminal or finding you if you are abducted. If the car is stolen, your prospect will be reluctant to give you a license number.

INTRODUCE THE PROSPECT TO SOMEONE IN YOUR OFFICE

A would-be assailant does not like to be noticed or receive exposure knowing a person could pick him out of a police lineup.

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 we show our i.d. to rent a movie. We can expect identification from our client before we show a home worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.



Tell someone



Who you are with

Where you are going

When you will be back

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/she can be identified.

Using the office itinerary form is a great way to communicate with the office staff (see page 19). 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 co-workers begin to worry, unless we tell them when to expect us 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.

Keep a cell phone at your side

Program your emergency numbers into speed dial. These numbers should include 911, emergency road service, your office, your buddy and your family numbers.

Keep your cell phone fully charged.

Carry your cell phone with you at all times, clip it on and make it part of your apparel. If you keep your cell phone in a purse or briefcase, it may not be available when you need it most.

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. See page 11 for more information regarding distress signals.

If you have an emergency situation and call 911, stay on the line, do not hang up.

Visualize emergency situations. Rehearse in your own mind how you would react to 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.

Your phone can be your
best friend
in a bad situation



Open house safety tips

Don't advertise a listing as vacant

Establish escape routes from each level of the house

Call the office or a buddy hourly

Keep your keys and cell phone with you

Park where you can get out quickly

Arrive early and survey exits to establish escape routes from each level. Make sure all deadbolt locks are unlocked to facilitate a faster escape. Double check the backyard to make sure you can get past the fence if necessary. When leaving the property, secure the house and check all windows and doors.

Avoid attics, basements and getting trapped in small rooms; let them lead the way into rooms.

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.

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.



Have a Distress code

Have a prearranged distress signal:

“I’m at the Jones house 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/her. This is where a prearranged distress code can help.

For example, you are in your car with a client that is beginning to make you nervous - for one reason or another, you feel uneasy about the person. You do not want to be in an empty house with him/her. Call the office and tell someone where you are going and you can ask him/her to pull out the RED FILE. In this case, RED FILE is the prearranged distress code to have someone meet you at the site so you will not be alone. You can make up your own distress code, i.e. DOG FOOD (when you don’t have a dog) or I’m going to MAYDAY Lane (and there is no Mayday Lane).

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 & Friends



Personal Marketing

Your marketing materials should be polished and professional.

Limit the amount of personal information you share.

Use your cell number, not your home phone.

Use your office address rather than your home address.

Giving out too much of the wrong information can make you a target. Concentrate on your professional proficiency rather than personal information in newspapers, resumes and business cards.

Be careful how much personal information you give verbally as well. "Getting to know your client" does not need to include personal information about your children, where you live and who you live with. Be guarded with your personal information.

Dress for safety. Look professional, but wear clothes that are comfortable and shoes you can run in.

Avoid glamour shots, your personal safety is too important.

We have seen cases of criminals actually circling photographs of their would-be victims in newspaper advertisements. These victims were targeted because of their appearance in the photograph.



Be a Buddy

Know in advance who 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**

Claudia Perry-Vance, a 23-year veteran in the business, was the best of buddies for a co-worker in Columbus, Ohio. Her buddy was a 26-year-old female agent who fell victim to a man who called himself Jack Martin and said he was a nuclear physicist from Tennessee. He was, in fact, Thomas H. Chappell, a local commercial cleaning service operator and a convicted rapist.

The salesperson met with Chappell several times at her office but didn't ask for identification. He told her that he wanted a high-end residential property and would pay cash for it. After developing a casual rapport with the salesperson, Chappell called her to come take a look at a property.

Just before she left her office, she asked her buddy, Claudia, to come along. "The only reason I went with her was that she felt a little nervous" Perry-Vance was quoted in a Realtor Magazine article.

Chappell met both women at the house. During the tour, Chappell was able to separate them and attacked the younger with a stun gun. She didn't lose consciousness and struggled with her attacker.

"She let out the most horrible scream I've ever heard," says Perry-Vance, who was in another room when the attack occurred. The scream sent Chappell running to his van, but the agents got his license number and called police.

When he was caught, police found an MLS book in the van with the young salesperson's photo circled in ink.

Excerpts from a story written by Timothy R. Dougherty appearing in REALTOR® magazine.



Dress for Safety

Don't wear expensive jewelry

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.

Expensive jewelry can make you a target. We recommend that you save the flashy jewelry for formal occasions. Criminals will scout real estate representatives and homes for jewelry and items that are easy to sell. Thieves often work in teams. So don't *flash the cash* or wear diamonds when you are in the office or on the road.

Always wear your cell phone. Get a holster or keep it in your hand at all times. Your greatest source of help is your cell phone. If you keep your phone in your purse or briefcase – you could be separated from it when you need it the most. If you are in immediate danger, run for safety first and when you have the opportunity, call 911.

Dress for the weather. Your mom used to tell you this for good reason. If your car breaks down or you need to escape a dangerous situation on foot, you could find yourself exposed to the weather for an extended period of time. In the winter, bring a coat with you and keep a blanket in the trunk of your car.



Wear shoes you can run in!

Danger

is not always easy to identify

Gut feelings

Hesitation

Unexplained fear

Apprehension

These are signals that something isn't right!

Joan Malone knows by firsthand experience that intuition can be a valuable tool for survival. She had told her husband that a particular customer had made her uncomfortable, but she agreed to show the man more homes despite gut feelings. Other indicators talked her out of listening to her unexplained fear - she had met with the well-dressed man twice before, the first time he told her he was an attorney who was dissolving a partnership and would have all-cash funds in a few days; once with his family members present.

On the day of the attack in March 1997, she showed the man 5 homes. Returning to a home they had previously viewed, he suddenly attacked her, stabbing her twice in the chest and once in the neck. He then left her for dead. Barely conscious, she managed to get to a phone and dial 911.

Although close to death a number of times because of serious injuries, Joan survived and now champions real estate safety. *"The nature of our business puts us in a very vulnerable situation,"* Malone told Blanche Evans in Realty Times, *"The one thing I could say to people is if you have a bad feeling, don't second guess what it's telling you. 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.



Trust your instincts!

Car Safety

Always have your keys with you

Park in a well lit area

Don't get blocked in

Beware of dead-end streets

Keep your car in good running condition

Consider using separate cars

You spend a lot of time in your car. This, in itself, exposes you to a greater likelihood of running out of gas, a mechanical failure or an accident. Make sure you have a fully-charged cell phone, tools, blankets, flares, first aid kit and warm clothes in the trunk of your car.

For driving safety, purchase a hands-free phone kit for your car.

Whenever possible, take separate cars. 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. Consider a keyless entry system for your next car. Make sure all doors are locked when you are driving. Secure valuables out of sight.

**If you must take one car,
you drive!**



Let them lead the way

Plan your escape routes in advance

Leave doors open

Avoid attics and basements

Walk behind your clients

You read about Maria Garcia in the introduction of this brochure – the real estate agent killed while showing a house in Brentwood, New York. According to the same story written by Timothy Dougherty, four months following the Garcia murder, another real estate agent was attacked in the same general area despite the heightened awareness of the industry there.

According to the story, Norberto Ruivo, an agent for Host Real Estate, met a man alone in a foreclosed property. When Ruivo took the prospect into the basement of the house, the man put a gun to his head, handcuffed him to a pipe and robbed him of his wallet and cellular phone. After several hours, Ruivo was rescued by a neighbor. Ruivo made the mistake of turning his back - he went into the basement ahead of the client.

When you show a house by yourself, pay close attention to your instincts. Do not lead the way, it is too easy to be cornered or trapped in a room, basement or attic. Have your client go ahead of you. You can comment on each room from the safety of the door, from where you can flee more easily if you get a bad feeling about the situation.

Before you show a house, plan your escape routes in advance. Leave all doors open.



Fight or Flight?

Yell “fire” to get attention

Run and call 911 when you can

Take a self-defense training course/class

If you strike, mean it

When faced with danger, 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 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:

- **No resistance** - Not resisting may be the proper choice in a 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/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 may give you time to assess the situation. When his/her guard is down, try to escape.
- **Distraction and then flight** - Obviously you should try to get away - but whether you can get away depends on your shoes, your clothing, your physical stamina, the terrain and how close your predator is.
- **Verbal assertiveness** - If someone is coming toward you, hold out your hands in front of you and yell, “Stop” or “Stay Back!” When interviewed, rapists 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.

Make a conscious effort to get an accurate description of your attacker(s). Even the smallest details may give authorities a clue to finding the suspect. The authors of *A Woman's Guide to Personal Safety* say that you should tell authorities everything that occurred and what was said during the incident, including the things that may seem unimportant.



Office procedures

The Real Estate Safety Council adopted three office forms that are recommended for all real estate offices, regardless of size. The forms were developed by agents for agents. Law enforcement officials were also consulted in the development of the forms. The purpose of these forms is as follows:

- 1. To deter assaults by positively identifying the people we are working with.*
- 2. To have emergency information for everyone in the real estate office.*
- 3. If a crime occurs - to know where the agent was going so the police can help.*
- 4. Every client wanting to meet with an agent should expect to be asked for identification.*

Personal Identification Form

Know who 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 may be the best preventative safety measure you and your office can take.

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

Agent Identification Form

If there was an accident or an agent did not check in when he/she was scheduled to, you or the police would need this information quickly. We recommend placing the Agent Identification Forms collectively in a separate folder that anyone can access. The information must be updated at least once a year. You may want to schedule an annual review of the information during Real Estate Safety Week.

Agent Itinerary Form

This simple form helps you find an agent when there is a problem at home and gives 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.

Free Forms Online

www.warealtor.com/safety Feel free to download and customize the forms for your own use. Add your own logo and office information.

Customer Identification form

This form could save your life. Every agent in Washington should fill out this form for every client he/she works with. Not only do you verify identity, but you also gather valuable information regarding their life-style, taste and qualifications. You can use this form to add personal notes about your client. These should be kept in a central location so others can access them in the event of an emergency.

(Your logo here)



CUSTOMER IDENTIFICATION FORM

This form is designed for your safety and security, along with that 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 is to be kept in branch office.

AGENT'S NAME: _____ DATE: _____

YOUR NAME(S): _____

HOME ADDRESS: _____ LOCAL CONTACT PHONE: _____

HOME & BUSINESS #'S: _____ PHONE: _____

IF FROM OUT OF TOWN: _____ COLOR: _____

LOCAL ADDRESS: _____

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

EMPLOYER: _____ MAKE & MODEL: _____ STATE: _____

AUTO: _____ OWNER: _____

LICENSE #: _____

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



Agent Identification form

This form is an important element of any office safety program. Your co-workers need to know what to do and who to call if you have a medical emergency or if you are missing. The forms should be held collectively in one folder for easy access. The information should be updated once per year.



(Your logo here)

AGENT IDENTIFICATION FORM

Updated: _____

NAME: _____

HOME ADDRESS: _____

CONTACT NUMBERS: (Include area codes) Home: _____ Home Office: _____
Cell: _____
Pager: _____
Other: _____ PHONE(S) _____

EMERGENCY CONTACTS: (Provide at least one) NAME _____ RELATIONSHIP _____

AUTO: (List your most frequently used auto first.) MAKE & MODEL _____ STATE _____
COLOR _____
OWNER _____
LICENSE # _____

2nd AUTO: MAKE & MODEL _____
COLOR _____
OWNER _____

PRIMARY PHYSICIAN: _____
PHONE: _____

SPECIAL MEDICAL CONDITIONS/MEDICATION: _____

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.



additional resources

National Association of REALTORS®

www.Realtor.org

www.realtormag.com

http://realtytimes.com/rtnews/rtcpages/20010119_safety.htm

Women's Council of REALTORS®

<http://www.wcr.org>

<http://www.realtormag.com/rmotoolkits.nsf/pages/safe14> (article by)

Washington Association of REALTORS®

<http://www.warealtor.com/safety>

Fight or flight

<http://www.dullesarea.com/public/documents/safety.asp>

<http://www.staysafeandsecure.com/new556.html>

<http://www.staysafeandsecure.com/catalog2775.html>

<http://www.staysafeandsecure.com/catalog1548.html>

http://www.telalink.net/~police/selfdef/protection_tips.htm

<http://www.ncpc.org/self.htm>

<http://www.teachersofdefense.com/safetips.html>

<http://www.channel4000.com/partners/tv/stories/partners-tv-980712-130649.html>

<http://pages.prodigy.net/selfdefense/rapetip.html>

<http://www.bigworm.com/~dsutton/whatis.html>

Open house safety tips

http://realtytimes.com/rtnews/rtapages/19980209_openhouse.htm

<http://fl.living.net/consinfo/frugal/decjanfeb98/Hssafetyfeb98.htm>

Safety sites

<http://www.charlestonrealtors.com//Safety.htm>

<http://www.channel4000.com/partners/tv/stories/partners-tv-980712-130649.html>

<http://pages.prodigy.net/selfdefense/rapetip.html>

<http://www.charlestonrealtors.com//Safety.htm>

<http://www.ci.mesa.az.us/police/realtor.htm>

<http://www.ih2000.net/bpd/SAFETY.HTM>

<http://buyerbroker.com/Agents/safety.html>

<http://www.yoursafety.ca/personal.html>

<http://www.duhaime.org/safety.htm>

<http://www.dobhran.com/greetings/Grinspire233.htm>

<http://www.telalink.net/~police/selfdef/>

<http://www.mpdcc.org/English/SafetyTips/Personal>



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