

The Safe Side

REALTOR
Safety Issues



BRITISH COLUMBIA
REAL ESTATE
ASSOCIATION

Safety first

The very nature of real estate involves personal risk because REALTORS often work alone in vacant buildings with people who are complete strangers. REALTORS assume the majority of these strangers will become clients, that they are really interested in the property being shown. As a REALTOR you should also remember that predators look for easy targets.

In October 2002, a Calgary REALTOR was attacked by a man who claimed to be looking for a new home for his family. The REALTOR was tied up in the basement, and her credit cards and car stolen. Police later determined the same suspect was also implicated in attacks on REALTORS in Vancouver and Edmonton.

In November 2002, a commercial REALTOR in Toronto was killed while she worked alone in her office. Five months later a suspect was arrested.

These are two recent incidents where REALTORS were performing their professional services, but their personal safety was unknowingly at risk.

There are a number of basic things you can do to protect your personal safety.

- **Keep a cell phone at your side**

Your cell phone can be your best friend in a bad situation. Program 911 on your speed dial.

- **Have a distress code**

Have a prearranged distress signal: For example, "I'm at the Jones house and I need the red file right away." Share and practice your distress code with your office, colleagues, family and friends. Use it any time you feel uneasy.

- **Make sure your office knows**

Tell someone who you are with, where you are going and when you will be back. Make sure someone else knows what your schedule is, and who you're planning to meet.

- **Don't glamorize promotional material**

Avoid glamour shots. Your marketing materials should be polished and professional. Limit the amount of personal information you share. Do not use your home phone number; use a cell phone number instead. Use your office address, rather than your home address.

- **Know who you are dealing with**

When you have new clients, meet them at the office first. Verify their identities. Get their car make and licence number and if you can, photocopy their driver's licence. Complete a Client I.D Form. A serious client will not hesitate to share this information.

- **Take precautions at Open Houses**

Often at an Open House, you'll be working alone. You won't know who will show up, so take basic precautions to ensure your personal safety.

What to do if a predator gets in your car

Chauffeuring clients or potential homebuyers around in your car is a great way to get to know them and move the sale along. You have an opportunity to show them the neighbourhood and point out schools or services. But being alone with you in a car is also an opportunity for a predator to strike. Make sure you have taken the necessary precautions ahead of time before you are put in an isolated situation.

Avoid being isolated - that's when a predator will strike. Despite your precautions, you might one day find yourself in your car with a predator. What should you do?

A predator may attempt to control you in your car while you are driving. Most people would simply do what they are told. Police officers call this the "secondary crime scene" and it is usually where the attack will occur.

Do what you can to stop a predator from taking you to another location.

The first rule: Stay calm. Be familiar with your area so you know where the nearest police station is. Drive there. Stay on routes with traffic and crowds of people.

As you come to a stop at a light or stop sign, move your car against a parked car so the predator cannot open their door. Stop abruptly, so the predator is thrown forward. Then unlock your door and climb out of the vehicle as fast as you can.

Take advantage of any distraction, such as the predator watching for police cars or a place he wants to turn. Hit the brakes, and jump out of the car.

You can prevent a predator's interest in you by demonstrating you are safety-conscious. Get proper ID, check references, get your client pre-qualified, and let your office know where you will be and how long you will be gone at all times. Don't fall for excuses from any client that you should skip such procedures because he is from "out of town and doesn't have much time."

You can also decide to never let clients in your car. Choose to bring along a friend or fellow REALTOR, and have the client follow you from the office in their own car. Once you get to the destination, park on the street so your car is not blocked in any way in case you need to escape from the home.



It can happen to you

Toronto REALTOR killed in her office

On a break from working on a Saturday, Lisa Posluns left her downtown Toronto office to do a little shopping. The 38-year-old commercial REALTOR was well-known to family and friends as a person who would put in long hours in order to ensure the best services for her clients. She was president, secretary, treasurer and sole director of Posluns Realty Inc., a company she had started four years earlier. In those four years, she had managed to build an impressive portfolio of clients, including several big names in the retail industry.

Late that Saturday afternoon in November 2002, a security camera captured her looking through sale items at a card and gift shop, then moving on out of frame. The camera captured the last images of Lisa alive.

Later that night, Lisa's mother, Margie, started to get worried. Lisa and her mother spoke daily, without fail, on the telephone. When midnight came and Margie still hadn't heard from her daughter, she contacted police.

Officers first went to Lisa's condo, located near her office. When a search failed to turn up any sign of her, police moved on to Posluns Realty. At 3:30 a.m., police found Lisa's body on the floor of a utility room in the basement of her office building. She had been stabbed repeatedly. After a five-month investigation, Toronto Police arrested Nelson DeJesus, then 33, on March 24, 2003. DeJesus had previously served time in prison for sexual assault with a weapon and forcible confinement. DeJesus was charged with first-degree murder in relation to Posluns' death.

Calgary REALTOR attacked

On Sept. 1, 2002, a REALTOR in Calgary was showing a man through a home in an upscale part of the city. He told her he was looking for a home in which to settle his family. Once the two were inside, he pulled a knife and tied her up in the basement of the house, and left with her car.

Reports of the incident were covered in the media across Alberta, and by the Calgary Real Estate Board. A REALTOR in Edmonton, seeing photos of the suspect, realized the same man had contacted her two weeks before. He said he was coming in from out of town, and asked to be picked up at the Edmonton airport and driven directly to a house he was interested in. The REALTOR insisted on taking him to her office beforehand, where the man abruptly decided to reschedule the appointment.

The Edmonton REALTOR contacted her daughter, a civilian member of the RCMP, and gave her the information she had on the man,

including the address of the motel where he was staying. Edmonton police arrested Bhupinder Singh Sahota, 42, in relation to the attack in Calgary and another incident where a credit card was stolen from a female REALTOR's purse while she was showing a prospective client homes. He was charged with robbery, unlawful confinement, uttering threats, and impersonation, and was remanded for a psychiatric assessment. He was also charged with theft over \$5,000 in Vancouver, where he had again stole a REALTOR's car.

Sahota had a history of attacks on REALTORS dating back to 1994, when he stole a male REALTOR's cell phone and car. Using cheques found in the car, he signed purchase agreements on two houses worth \$400,000 and \$600,000. In all, Sahota was charged with over 60 crimes relating to fraud and theft.

Preparing for an Open House

Safety should also be a concern if you're preparing an Open House. Salespeople can partner at Open Houses, or you can arrange for a substitution. Statistics show a female is more likely to be personally attacked than a male.

These are some of the basic things you can do to protect your personal safety during an Open House:

1. When you enter a house for the first time, check all rooms and determine several "escape routes."
2. Make sure all deadbolt locks are unlocked to make a faster escape possible.
3. Check that you can escape from a backyard if you flee through a back door; frequently, high fences surround yards with pools and hot tubs.
4. Place your business card, with date and time on the back in a kitchen cupboard; note on it if you were the first arrival or if clients were waiting.
5. When prospects arrive, jot down car descriptions, license plate numbers and physical descriptions.
6. Always walk behind the prospect and show the house by directing not leading them. Say, for example, "The kitchen is on your left," and gesture for them to go ahead of you.
7. Watch what prospects are doing at all times; don't become preoccupied with viewing the home.
8. Notify someone in your office, or at your answering service, or a relative or friend that you will be calling in every hour on the hour; if you don't call, they are to notify police immediately.
9. Inform a neighbour that you are showing the house and ask him or her to be aware of anything out of the ordinary.
10. If possible, have someone from your office, or a relative or friend stay with you during the Open House.

Ottawa Open House

On a Sunday afternoon in April 2002, an Ottawa REALTOR was preparing for an open house in a trendy west-end suburb. The listing wasn't even hers; she was conducting the open house as a favour for a friend.

There were three tours required for the different people who showed up for the open house. One was a family, a couple, and the third was a well-dressed, well-groomed, well-spoken man with a slight Eastern European accent who said he was from out of town, in the process of relocating his family. As the REALTOR went over the house's features with the couple, the man asked if he could look at the basement. Preoccupied with her conversation with the couple, the REALTOR agreed.

By the time the man came back upstairs, the other two interested parties had left. He approached the REALTOR, asked her a specific question about schools in the area, saying he had small children. The REALTOR agreed to write down some information, but couldn't find the pen she had left on top of

the sign-in book. As she went through to the kitchen in search of a pen, the man locked the front door, and followed her into the kitchen.

"He came at me and started to assault me," the REALTOR recalls. "I had just watched a TV show that said you have about 30 seconds to act in the event you're assaulted. It also said you should make as much noise as possible. I started screaming and pushed myself away, and he came at me again. I kept screaming, and he stopped, ran to the front door, unlocked the door, and ran out."

The REALTOR reported the assault to the police and the Ottawa Real Estate Board. To this point, no arrests have been made. The REALTOR still handles open houses, but says she's made some changes to her routine.

"If someone doesn't sign in, I won't let them in," she says. "I keep the doors locked, and I try to keep my cell phone in my hand the entire time. And I never go on an appointment without letting my husband or my office know where I am."

Open House Checklist

Often at an Open House, or when showing a home, you'll be working alone. You won't know who will show up for an Open House, or may not know much about the client coming for a showing. So there are a number of basic precautions you should take to ensure your personal safety.

Photocopy and use this convenient checklist to make sure your safety is not compromised.

- When you enter the house for the first time, check all the rooms and determine several "escape routes."
- Make sure all deadbolt locks are unlocked to make a faster escape possible. Make sure all locks are back on once the Open House or the showing is over.
- Check that you can escape from a backyard if you flee through a back door. In many areas, the high fences that surround yards with pools and hot tubs make escape difficult, if not impossible.
- Place your business card, with date and time on the back in a kitchen cupboard. Make a note on it if you were the first to arrive or if clients were waiting.
- As prospective clients arrive, jot down car descriptions, license plate numbers and physical descriptions.
- Always walk behind the prospect and show the house by directing not leading them. Say, for example, "The kitchen is on your left," and gesture for them to go ahead of you. Watch what prospects are doing at all times; don't become preoccupied with viewing the home.
- Notify someone in your office, or at your answering service, or a relative or friend that you will be calling at regular intervals (every hour on the hour; or every two hours) If you don't call, they are to notify police immediately.
- Let a neighbour know you are showing the house and ask them to also be aware of anything out of the ordinary.
- If possible, have someone from your office, or a relative or friend stay with you during the Open House.

Make your personal safety your first, second and third priority.



Safety Scenarios What Would You Do?

Read the following descriptions of typical REALTOR situations. Think about what would be your normal response, what possible dangers are indicated, and what you could do better to reduce the risks. The answers are in the REALTOR Safety Site on the front page of www.realtorlink.ca.



Scenario #1: Open House

You are hosting an open house by yourself on a winter day. As the sun is setting and you are locking up, a nicely-dressed man pulls into the drive and quickly hops out of his car. He apologizes for coming so late and says that he is very glad to have arrived before you left. He begs you to let him see the property as he has wanted to buy this style of home in this neighborhood for some time now. You had very few prospects visit the open house, so you would hate to miss this opportunity. What do you do?

My answer: _____



Scenario #2: Listing Presentation

You receive a phone call from a man who says he is interviewing REALTORS to sell his lakeside vacation home. You can hear children laughing in the background and he apologizes for all the racket his kids are making. He wants to hear your listing presentation and get your ideas about a good asking price, so he asks you to meet him at the property this evening at 8:00. What do you do?

My answer: _____



Scenario #3: Showing a Property

On your first day with this prospect, you showed him three homes, and he acted like a typical buyer, asking all the expected questions and looking carefully at each home. On this occasion, it is a cold day and he offers to drive you since his car is already warmed up. He mentions that he would really like to see a home with a basement bedroom for his teenage son so he can play his music as loud as he likes. You know a house that fits his needs perfectly so you take him there to show him the nicely finished basement with rec room, bedroom, and full bath. What would you do?

My answer: _____

Scenario #4: Answering Calls



You get a cold call from a prospect who says he is about to take a new job in the area and he would like to look at some houses in a particular neighborhood his future boss recommended. He says that he's open to other suggestions, and he asks where you live and what your neighborhood is like. Because he'll need to move quickly, he wants to look at homes that are already vacant. After chatting about the kind of house he is looking for, he says he's looking forward to working with you and asks if you're as cute in person as your photo in the ad. He asks, with a friendly chuckle, if you're still "on the market" or has a lucky guy already snapped you up. He closes by saying he'd like to start his search at a particular house in the ad, first thing tomorrow morning, and asks for directions so he can meet you there. How do you respond?

My answer: _____



Scenario 5: Going to Closings

As you are about to leave a closing, you see three men loitering in the parking lot. When you get in your car, they also get into their car, and they pull out behind you as you leave. How would you react?

My answer: _____



Scenario 6: Sizing up a Prospect

A new customer agrees to meet you at your office on a Saturday to fill out the pre-qualifying information forms. Though he lists his occupation as a banker, he is wearing scruffy jeans and a worn T-shirt. He gives you an odd look when you request his license and registration. He tells you that he'll have to go out to the car to get the registration and asks why you need that. What do you do?

My answer: _____

This quiz is also part of the CREA REALTOR Safety Site on the front page of www.realtorlink.ca, and the answers are posted there for your reference. These scenarios are provided courtesy of the National Association of Realtors.



10-Second Rule for Personal Safety

Inattention is one of the main reasons people find themselves in dangerous situations. Take a few precious seconds during the course of your day to assess your surroundings.

Take 10 Seconds when you arrive at your destination.

- Is there a questionable activity in the area?
- Are you parked in a well-lit, visible location?
- Can you be blocked in the driveway by a prospect's vehicle?

Take 10 Seconds after you step out of your car.

- Are there suspicious people around?
- Do you know exactly where you're going?

Take 10 Seconds as you walk towards your destination.

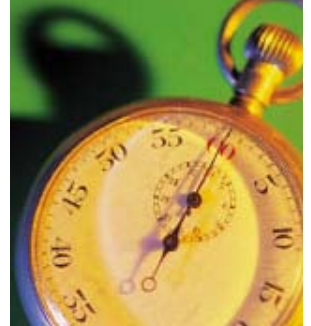
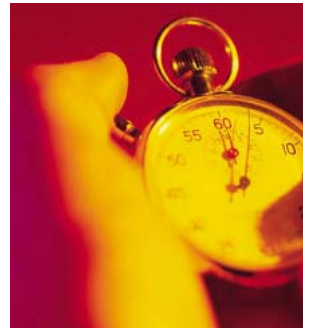
- Are people coming and going or is the area unusually quiet?
- Do you observe any obstacles or hiding places in the parking lot or along the street?
- Is anyone loitering in the area?

Take 10 Seconds at the door.

- Do you have an uneasy feeling as you're walking in?
- Is someone following you in?

Take 10 Seconds as soon as you enter your destination.

- Does anything seem out of place?
- Is anyone there who shouldn't be, is someone there who isn't expected?



**Taking in your surroundings lets you spot and avoid danger.
Make it a habit. Then share it with someone else.**



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, used for solicitation purposes, or distribution in any fashion to third parties.

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

AGENT'S NAME: _____ DATE: _____

YOUR NAME(S): _____

HOME ADDRESS: _____

HOME & BUSINESS NUMBERS: _____

IN FROM OUT OF TOWN: _____ LOCAL CONTACT PHONE: _____

LOCAL ADDRESS: _____

I (WE) CAN BE CONTACTED AT THIS LOCATION UNTIL: _____

EMPLOYER: _____ PHONE: _____

AUTO OWNER: _____

MAKE & MODEL: _____ COLOR: _____

RENTAL COMPANY: _____

LICENSE PLATE NUMBER: _____ PROV/STATE: _____

Photocopy Driver's License(s) or other Photo ID(s) and attach to this form.

