

# The Safe Side

REALTOR® Safety Issues





### **Remember...**

Trust your instincts. You should always listen to what your senses tell you. If a person is making you feel uncomfortable, or you're being led into a situation you feel you can't control, get out. Whatever reasons you might have to stay, they're not worth your life.

You should also be aware of your surroundings. Don't let yourself be manipulated, trapped or isolated, and be ready to react quickly if you think that's what is happening.



## 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 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.



# SAFETY FIRST

The very nature of real estate involves personal risk because REALTORS® often work alone in vacant buildings with complete strangers.

REALTORS® assume the majority of these strangers will become clients and that they're really interested in the property being shown. As a REALTOR®, you should also remember that predators look for easy targets.

In February 2008, a REALTOR® in Victoria was stabbed to death while meeting a "client" at an upscale home listed for sale. According to her co-workers, she had felt uncomfortable about the meeting, but went anyway. Police found her body when they responded to a 911 call from the house.

In December 2007, a Winnipeg REALTOR® was sexually assaulted in a man's apartment when she brought him forms to fill out and sign. The REALTOR® had shown the man several houses that day and he asked her to bring the forms so he could make an offer on one of them. When police released the suspect's name and photo, another REALTOR® said the same man had tried to lure her to his apartment the previous spring and she had reported the incident to police.

These incidents show how easily REALTORS® can find themselves in dangerous situations. REALTORS® often feel pressured to meet clients at a time and place chosen by the client, and don't always think about risks to their personal safety.

There are a number of things you can do to protect yourself:

- **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 where you are**

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 publicize personal information**

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're 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.

# 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. Remember that attacks can happen to both male and female REALTORS®.

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'll 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.

## **Two men arrested in REALTOR® holdup; Suspects posed as potential buyers of house** (2007)

In October 2007, a REALTOR® in Surrey B.C. was attacked and robbed while showing a house.

The REALTOR® was attacked by two men as she showed them a \$1.7-million Surrey home.

She was tied up, gagged and robbed by the pair, who were posing as potential buyers.

The victim was able to free herself and seek help from a neighbour. She wasn't seriously hurt.

The two men were later arrested at their homes in Surrey and Burnaby.

The attack had sparked outrage from the Lower Mainland's estimated 11,000 REALTORS®, who vowed to do their part to nab the duo.



# 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 neighborhood 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're 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.

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 can't 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're safety-conscious. Get proper ID, check references, get your client pre-qualified, and let your office know where you'll be and how long you'll 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.



# SAFETY AT THE OFFICE

A REALTOR®'s office can be a dangerous place as well, particularly if you're working late and alone. The following safety procedures can help keep you safe from robbery or assault at your workplace:

1. Keep your windows and counters clear. Robbers can be dissuaded from attacking an office if it's clearly visible from outside.
2. Keep a radio or TV playing loudly in the back room when you're alone in the office – do whatever you can to make it look like there's someone else there with you.
3. Secure all unused doors and windows, especially if they are in the rear of the office and out of sight and ear shot.
4. Whenever possible, avoid being at the office alone.
5. Lock office doors after hours.
6. Immediately report harassing phone calls to your employer and to the police.
7. Always carry a charged cell phone. Make it part of your everyday apparel for immediate accessibility.
8. Take a personal safety or self-defense course.



## IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU

### **Man tries to rape real estate agent**

(2007)

A 36-year-old man is accused of feigning interest in buying a house in Winnipeg, then luring and attempting to rape a female real estate agent during a struggle in his home. Real estate agents are now being urged to take necessary safety precautions when they're showing homes and meeting potential buyers.

Police spokesperson Const. Jacqueline Chaput said the suspect assaulted and tried to sexually assault the 50-year-old victim when the pair was alone.

The Dec. 28 attack ended when the woman escaped.

"She fought back physically and she fought back very hard, which was the right thing to do in this case because there was no escape for her at that point," Chaput said.

The agent fled in her car and drove to a friend's house for help. She required medical attention for injuries to her upper body.

Earlier that day, police allege the suspect and woman looked at homes for sale in Fort Rouge. They had never met before.

Hours later, the suspect told the agent he was interested in buying one of the houses, so she went to an apartment with the paperwork.

"Clearly, there was some planning involved in this incident," Chaput said.

Police and the Winnipeg REALTORS® Association are urging REALTORS® to show homes with a co-worker or spouse if possible, notify someone of their whereabouts, and first meet clients in an office or public place.

Linda van den Broek, a REALTOR® with Re/Max Executives on Henderson Highway, said she has never been in a hostile situation, but the potential for one is on her mind.

"I think sometimes we're a little complacent and think, 'Oh, it will never happen to me'. We can't be overcautious," van den Broek said.





# IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU

## Slain agent was 'targeted,' colleague says

(2008)

When police first went to the empty house in Saanich, B.C., where they would find the body of real estate agent Lindsay Buziak, they were responding to a routine call to check on a person's welfare.

"It was determined by our detective division that Lindsay was murdered," Constable Brad Brajcich of the Saanich Police told reporters at a briefing yesterday.

Buziak apparently went to the newly constructed \$964,000 home in the upscale neighborhood on Saturday hoping to make a sale, after she agreed to help a female client find a million-dollar home before nightfall. The woman's identity has not been revealed, but sources at the real estate agency, Re/Max Camosun, said that Buziak found the woman's demands odd and the situation made her nervous.

"We don't know why she was there and who was there with her, who took her life," Constable Brajcich said in an interview yesterday.

Police would not confirm that Buziak was lured to her death, but nervous members of Victoria's real estate industry feel differently.

"She was targeted, absolutely; it was a scheduled showing," said Chris Markham, president-elect of the Victoria Real Estate Board.

Constable Brajcich said police have no suspects, but are interviewing numerous people.

Police say a 911 call is central to their investigation, but they would not reveal who made it.

At the home of Buziak's mother, Evelyn Reitmayer, the shades were drawn and lights turned off. Buziak's father, Jeff, flew into town on the weekend from Calgary where he now resides.

A man who identified himself as Gary came to the door. He said the family was in shock and had very little information from the police.

"We don't have anything to say. We're in the dark like everyone else. We don't know anything."

## Commercial REALTOR® killed in Toronto

(2002)

Lisa Posluns, a REALTOR® in Toronto who ran a commercial brokerage company, was murdered on November 2nd, 2002 in the building where her offices were located. Police believe the murder took place around 8:00p.m. while she was leaving the office.

Posluns, 38, was stabbed to death. Her body was found by her sister, along with police, in the utility room four floors beneath her office early on the morning of November 3rd.

Nelson Jesus, 33, was arrested and later convicted of the killing. Police said Jesus was known to loiter in the Bloor Street and Bedford Road area, as well as the University of Toronto campus.

In 1995, Mr. Jesus, 25 at the time, had been charged with sexually assaulting three teenage girls in separate incidents. During one incident a 17-year-old was handcuffed at gunpoint and sexually assaulted. She managed to escape.

# FIGHT OR FLIGHT?

## Escape is the best self-defense

Even with the most diligent use of safe work habits, you may find yourself confronted by a dangerous person. While REALTORS® should consider taking a basic self-defense course, the primary goal in any incident must be to escape from danger and call for help.

When faced with menacing behaviour, you should first try to find a discreet way of removing yourself from the situation. Try to avoid triggering an emotional response from a potentially dangerous person.

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: the location of the attack, your personal resources, an assailant's characteristics, the presence of a weapon, etc. There are many strategies that are effective, but you must rely on your own judgement to choose the best one.

- **No resistance:** Not resisting might be the proper choice in a given situation. An attacker with a weapon may put you in a situation where you think it's safer to do what he or she says. If someone tries to rob you, don't fight. Give up your property, not your life.
- **Stalling for time:** Appear to go along with the attacker. This might give you time to assess the situation. Try to escape when you get the chance.
- **Distraction and then flight:** Obviously you should try to get away, but whether you can depends on many things, including your shoes, clothing, physical stamina, the terrain and your proximity to your attacker.
- **Verbal assertiveness:** If someone is coming toward you, hold your hands out in front of you and yell "Stop!" or "Stay back!" Attackers have been known to leave a potential victim alone if he or she yelled or showed that he or she was not afraid to fight back.
- **Physical resistance:** If you decide to respond physically, remember that your first response should be to flee the area or the home. Act quickly and decisively to throw the attacker off-guard while you get away. Your personal safety is your first priority – property can be replaced, but the value of your life and health is beyond measure.
- **Observation:** Be sure to make an effort to get an accurate description of your attacker(s). Even the smallest details may give authorities a clue to finding the suspect(s).

# 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 can be found at [http://realtorlink.ca/content/realtor\\_safety/test/answers.htm](http://realtorlink.ca/content/realtor_safety/test/answers.htm)



### 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: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# Safety Scenarios

## 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](http://www.realtorlink.ca), and the answers are posted there for your reference. These scenarios are provided courtesy of the National Association of REALTORS®.

# OPEN HOUSE CHECKLIST

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.***



## **Murderer of REALTOR® sentenced**

(2005)

John Adam Robson pleaded guilty to first-degree murder for raping and strangling a popular REALTOR® in Calgary in 2004. Robson was sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 25 years for killing Susanne Lee.

Her family may never know what motivated the attack. Robson, who had no known history of criminal conduct or antisocial practices, gave a detailed confession after his arrest. But when asked why he did it, he replied, "I don't know". Her son Michael Lam said it is something that the family has on their minds. "But we do feel after the sentence there is a sense of relief and it's a big step forward to finding closure," he said.

Wearing a beard, shoulder-length dark hair and dark blue prison garb, Robson didn't shed any more light on a possible motive for killing the REALTOR®. He displayed no emotion throughout the hearing. He glanced toward his victim's family only briefly as he was escorted into court in handcuffs. When asked by the judge if he had anything to say before sentencing, he said, "No, sir". Defence lawyer John Bascom said Robson had planned to plead guilty since the preliminary hearing.

Crown prosecutor George Combe said Lee was acting as landlord for the owners of a northwest Calgary property where Robson resided in a basement suite. Robson asked Lee to come to his home to pick up rent cheques, Combe said, reading from an agreed statement of facts. Robson forced Lee at gunpoint to remove her clothes.

He then tied her hands with a belt, wrapped a bootlace around her neck and asphyxiated her. He took off in her car, went to a movie and a strip club, and then headed out of town. He was arrested in Medicine Hat, Alta., when he was stopped for speeding. He told the policeman who stopped him that he had killed his landlady and he told him where to look for her.

## **Man ordered to stop calling real estate agents**

(2006)

A resident of St. John's, Newfoundland has been released on probation on condition that he stop making harassing phone calls to real estate agents. Evelio Pages was charged after real estate agents complained to police about harassing phone calls at all hours of the day and night.

According to police the man called numerous REALTORS® day and night, but seemed to focus on those at one specific franchise office. Broker Anne Squires said the man called as many as 30 times a week.

"The calls were pretty explicit," said Squires. "He was looking for a real estate agent, he was going to have himself an agent and, even more overpowering, was, 'I know where you live, I know where you are'."

Pages received a suspended sentence and was given probation on condition that he not contact the franchise office for one year and stay away from other REALTORS® except for specific business purposes.

The President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of REALTORS®, Bruce Mullett, says the association will have a REALTOR® safety training program for new members, and reminds current members of things they can do to protect themselves.

"REALTORS® need to have their faces and phone numbers in the public eye because of the nature of their jobs. It's something that we don't take lightly in the industry," said Mullett.

"You have to act responsibly. We don't take it lightly and it can be very creepy for somebody phoning and harassing realtors like that."

## 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.

Any questions or comments about the service or products CREA provides?  
You can contact us on-line at [info@crea.ca](mailto:info@crea.ca).

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