56 Safety Tips for REALTORS®

May 24, 2012**Share knowledge, awareness, and empowerment with your members year-round**
Keep a strong focus on REALTOR® Safety throughout the year when you share these safety tips with your members every week. You can post them on your website, add them to your newsletters, or email them directly to your members.

Feel free to re-arrange the tips if you like. Regardless of when you send them, these weekly tips will help remind our members of the tenets of REALTOR® Safety: knowledge, awareness, and empowerment.

All tips are taken from NAR's REALTOR® Safety Resource Kit. Direct your members to your own association website or to NAR's safety web pages at www.REALTOR.org/Safety for more information on the important topic of REALTOR® safety.

Tip #1

Keep it light

Show properties before dark. If you are going to be working after hours, advise your associate or first-line supervisor of your schedule. If you must show a property after dark, turn on all lights as you go through, and don't lower any shades or draw curtains or blinds.

Tip #2

Checking-in

When you have a new client, ask him/her to stop by your office and complete a Prospect Identification Form (Find a copy online at www.REALTOR.org/Safety). Also, photocopy their driver’s license and retain this information at your office. Be certain to properly discard this personal information when you no longer need it.

Tip #3

Don’t be too public

Limit the amount of personal information you share. Consider advertising without using your photograph, home phone number and/or home address in the newspaper or on business cards. Don’t use your full name with middle name or initial. Use your office address—or list no address at all. Giving out too much of the wrong information can make you a target.

Tip #4

Touch base

Always let someone know where you are going and when you will be back; leave the name and phone number of the client you are meeting and schedule a time for your office to call you to check in.

Tip #5

Open house safety

Open house: it ain't over till it's over. Don't assume that everyone has left the premises at the end of an open house. Check all of the rooms and the backyard prior to locking the doors. Be prepared to defend yourself, if necessary.

Tip #6

Stranger danger

Tell your clients not to show their home by themselves. Alert them that not all agents, buyers and sellers are who they say they are. Predators come in all shapes and sizes. We tell our children not to talk to strangers. Tell your sellers not to talk to other agents or buyers, and to refer all inquiries to you.

Tip #7

Sturdy doors are key to home safety

Make sure that all your home's doors to the outside are metal or solid, 1 ¾" hardwood, and have good, sturdy locks.

Tip #8

Block identity theft

Contact the fraud department of any of the three consumer reporting companies— Equifax®, ExperianSM and Trans Union®—to place a fraud alert on your credit report. The fraud alert automatically lets credit card companies and other creditors know they must contact you before opening any new accounts or making any changes to your existing accounts.

Tip #9

Keep track of colleagues

Have a check-out employee board at your office, listing your name, destination, customer name, date and expected return time.

Tip #10

Wear your REALTOR® ID

Always wear visible company identification such as a badge. It is also best to drive a vehicle clearly marked with your company name. These will be invaluable for identification if you need to get assistance.

Tip #11

Bring up the rear

When showing a home, always have your prospect walk in front of you. Don't lead them, but rather, direct them from a position slightly behind them. You can gesture for them to go ahead of you and say, for example, "The master suite is in the back of the house."

Tip #12

Pick up some self-defense skills

The best way to find a good self-defense class is to learn what is available, and then make a decision. Many health clubs, martial arts studios and community colleges offer some type of class. You can also ask your peers, friends and family if they have taken a self-defense class that they would recommend.

Tip #13

You take the wheel

Whenever possible, take your own car to a showing. When you leave your car, lock it.

Tip #14

Shield your computer from e-mail viruses

Computer viruses can impair and seriously damage your computer. Viruses are often distributed via attachments in e-mail spam. Never open an attachment from someone you don't know, and, if you receive a strange or impersonal-sounding message from a familiar address, check with that person to make sure that they really sent it.

Tip #15

Got cell service, everywhere?

When you're showing commercial property, thick walls and/or remote locations may interfere with mobile phone reception. Check in advance to be sure your phone is serviceable in the area in which you are showing the property.

Tip #16

Choose flight over fight

While every real estate agent should take a basic self-defense course, the primary goal in any threatening situation is to escape from immediate danger and call for help.

Tip #17

“Who’s calling?”

Install caller I.D. on your telephone, which should automatically reject calls from numbers that have been blocked. This will provide you with immediate information about the source of the call.

Tip #18

Your trash is another man’s treasure

Just bought a new entertainment system? A bunch of empty boxes out by the curb triggers an alarm to would-be thieves. Instead of putting boxes out in plain sight, cut them down, and stuff them in trash bags.

Tip #19

Hide personal information

Tell your sellers: DON'T leave personal information like mail or bills out in the open where anyone can see it. Be sure to lock down your computer and lock up your laptop and any other expensive, easy-to-pocket electronics, like iPods, before your showing.

Tip #20

Agree on an office distress code

Create a voice distress code, a secret word or phrase that is not commonly used but can be worked into any conversation for cases where you feel that you are in danger. Use this if the person you are with can overhear the conversation, but you don’t want to alarm them. Example: “Hi, this is Jennifer. I’m with Mr. Henderson at the Elm Street listing. Could you email me the RED FILE?”

Tip #21

Have your excuse ready

Part of being prepared to deal with a threatening situation is having “an out.” Prepare a scenario in advance so that you can leave—or you can encourage someone who makes you uncomfortable to leave. Examples: Your cell phone or pager went off and you have to call your office, you left some important information in your car, or another agent with buyers is on his way.

Tip #22

Take two seconds when you arrive at your destination to check out potential dangers:

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

Tip #23

You are not alone

If you encounter an individual while working late or alone in your office, indicate to that person that you are not alone. Say something like, “Let me check with my supervisor to see whether she’s able to see you now.”

Tip #24

Your email is public

Don’t send any vital or private information via email. Keep in mind that unlike websites, email is *never* secure.

Tip #25

Don’t get lost

If you are in an unfamiliar area, make mental notes of landmarks, points of interest and intersections. And always know the exact address of where you are going. If you must use a GPS, then pull over and stop in a safe place first.

Tip #26

Careful with cash deposits!

If you periodically carry large deposits to the bank, be especially aware of any strangers lurking around the office parking lot. If you must transport cash deposits, use the buddy system or arrange for a security service or police escort.

Tip #27

Lock up client keys

Be sure to use the lockbox property-key procedure that has been established to improve real estate agent safety. A reliable, secure lockbox system such as those made by NAR REALTOR Benefits® Partner SentriLock ensures that keys don’t fall into the wrong hands.

Tip #28

Shop online safely

When shopping online, check out a website before entering your credit card number or other personal information. Enter this information only on secure web pages with addresses that start with "https" and have a closed padlock symbol at the bottom of the browser window. These are signs that your information will be encrypted or scrambled, protecting it from hackers.

Tip #29

Nothing personal…

When talking to clients and prospects, be friendly but still keep your personal information private. This means avoiding mention of where you live, your after-work or vacation plans, and similar details.

Tip #30

Take two seconds as you walk towards your destination to check out potential risks.

- 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?

Tip #31

Be careful with keys

Don't hand out house keys to friends, even if they are trustworthy. Know the location of all your house keys all the time. Never use hide-a-keys or leave the key under the doormat, above the door, in a flowerpot, or anywhere outside the house. You may think you're being clever, but experienced thieves know all the tricks. Also, keep your car keys and house keys on a different ring if you ever use valet parking or leave your keys with parking lot attendants or even at a repair garage.

Tip #32

From dawn till dusk

When showing a vacant commercial site, be aware of the time of day you meet a client. Showing a property at dusk or after dark, with no electricity on in the space you are showing, is not advisable.

Tip #33

Thwart thieves

Remind your clients that strangers will be walking through their home during showings or open houses. Tell them to hide any valuables in a safe place. For security’s sake, remember to remove keys, credit cards, jewelry, crystal, furs and other valuables from the home or lock them away during showings. Also

remove prescription drugs. Some seemingly honest people wouldn't mind getting their hands on a bottle of Viagra, uppers or downers.

Tip #34

Long-term thinking

If you think it may be some time before a property sells (and you may, therefore, be showing it often), get acquainted with a few of the immediate neighbors. You will feel better knowing they know your vehicle, and they will feel better about the stranger (you) who frequently visits their neighborhood.

Tip #35

Don’t dial and drive!

Using a cell phone while driving can cause an accident. For driving safety, purchase a hands-free phone kit for your vehicle. And never attempt to take notes while driving – pull over and stop in a safe place first.

Tip #36

Carry less

If you carry a purse, lock it in your car trunk before arriving at an appointment. Carry only non-valuable business items (except for your cell phone), and do not wear expensive jewelry or watches, or appear to be carrying large sums of money.

Tip #37

Don’t get parked-in

When showing property or meeting someone, park your car in front of the property rather than in the driveway. You will avoid having your car blocked in, you’ll have an easier time escaping in your vehicle, and you will attract lots of attention running and screaming to your car at the curb area.

Tip #38

Monitor your financial accounts

Open your credit card bills and bank statements right away. Check for any unauthorized charges or withdrawals and report them immediately. Call if bills don’t arrive on time. It may mean that someone has changed contact information to hide fraudulent charges.

Tip #39

Take two seconds to pause and look around as you enter your destination.

- Does anything seem out of place?
- Is anyone present who shouldn't be there or who isn't expected?

Tip #40

Plan ahead with escape routes

Upon entering an open house property for the first time, check each room and determine at least two "escape" routes. Make sure all deadbolt locks are unlocked for easy access to the outside.

Tip #41

Keep it professional

All of your marketing materials should be polished and professional. Don't use alluring or provocative photography in advertising, on the Web or on your business cards. There are many documented cases of criminals actually circling photographs of their would-be victims in newspaper advertisements.

Tip #42

Best practices for model home showings

When a person comes through the office to view a model home, have them complete a guest register that includes their full name, address, phone number, email, and vehicle information.

Tip #43

Safe apartment living

Moving into an apartment? Have the locks changed when you move in. (The maintenance crew can simply swap lock cylinders with a random vacant apartment, a project that is free and takes only a few minutes.) And just use your last name, or if necessary last name and first initial, on your door or mailbox. This keeps strangers from knowing your gender or how many people live in your apartment.

Tip #44

Rely on good neighbors

Inform a neighbor that you will be hosting an open house, and ask if he or she would keep an eye and ear open for anything out of the ordinary.

Tip #45

Be prepared: pre-program!

To best prepare for an emergency, pre-program important numbers into your cell phone. These may

include your office, your roadside assistance service or garage, and 9-1-1.

Tip #46

Beware of “phishers”

Don’t respond to emails requesting personal or private information such as passwords, credit card numbers or bank account numbers. Even if a message appears to be from your bank or a trusted vendor, credible companies never request private information this way.

Tip #47

Scam alert!

At an open house, be alert to visitors’ comings and goings, especially near the end of showing hours. Police have reported groups of criminals that target open houses, showing up en masse near the end of the afternoon. While several "clients" distract the agent, others go through the house and steal anything they can quickly take.

Tip #48

Make your clients your “safety partners”

Inform clients who are selling that while you are taking safety precautions, and that you've checked and locked the home before leaving, they should immediately double-check all locks and scout for missing items immediately upon their return, in case you've missed any less-than-obvious means of entry.

Tip #49

Don’t use the “v word”

When describing a listing, never say that a property is “vacant.” This may be an invitation to criminals.

Tip #50

Check suspicious emails

Before you act on an email request, check a list of the latest email scams on the Federal Trade Commission’s website at http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/menu-internet.htm