
REALTOR® SAFETY

SECTION THREE: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS

SECTION 3 INCLUDES:
SAFETY AT PROPERTY SHOWINGS
SHOWING AND MANAGING COMMERCIAL PROPERTY
FIGHT OR FLIGHT
GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A SELF-DEFENSE COURSE
SAFETY ON THE ROAD
CELL PHONE SAFETY
10-SECOND RULE
SAFETY AT OPEN HOUSES
PROTECT YOURSELF WITH A DISTRESS CODE SYSTEM
SHARE SAFETY TIPS WITH YOUR CLIENTS

knowledge awareness empowerment

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**SAFETY AT PROPERTY SHOWINGS**

When meeting a client alone, you can minimize your risk by adopting these safety precautions:

- When you have a new client, ask him/her to stop by your office and complete a Prospect Identification Form (an example of this form is online at www.REALTOR.org/Safety), preferably in the presence of an associate. Get the client's car make and license number.
- Call references and verify their employment and current address, and retain this information at your office.
- Check county property records to confirm the ownership of a property before you go to a listing appointment or approach a for-sale-by-owner listing. The more information you have, the easier and faster it is for police to catch a perpetrator if you become a victim.
- 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/her out of a police lineup.
- 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.
- Have a check-out employee board at work, listing your name, destination, customer name, date and expected return time.
- Never list a property as "vacant." This is an open invitation to criminals.
- 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.
- 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 REALTOR Benefits® Program partner Sentrilock (www.sentrilock.com) ensures that keys don't fall into the wrong hands.
- Try and call the office once an hour to let people know where you are.

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SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS Safety at Property Showings CONT.,

- 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.
- Establish a 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. The distress code could be something as simple as "Hi, this is Jane. I'm at [address]. Could you e-mail me the red file?" 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 9-1-1. See the "Protect Yourself with a Distress Code System" handout for more information.
- Preview the property and don't go into a neighborhood that you perceive as unsafe. Be familiar with the area so you know the location of the nearest police station. Drive there immediately if you feel you are in danger.
- In showing a property, always leave the front door unlocked for a quick exit while you and the client are inside. As you enter each room, stand near the door.
- Prepare a scenario so that you can leave, or encourage someone who makes you uncomfortable to leave. Examples: Your cell phone or beeper 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.
- It is better to not display purses while at a property. Lock your purse in the car trunk before you arrive. 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.
- Park at the curb in front of the property rather than in the driveway. You will attract much more attention running and screaming to the curb area. It is much easier to escape in your vehicle if you don't have to back out of a driveway. Besides, parked in a driveway, another vehicle could purposefully or accidentally trap you.

(Sources: Louisiana REALTORS® Association; Washington Real Estate Safety Council; City of Albuquerque, NM; City of Mesa, AZ)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**SHOWING AND MANAGING COMMERCIAL PROPERTY**

Property management may be one of the most dangerous careers in real estate because you are typically showing vacant properties to prospective customers. Here are several things to keep in mind:

- Communication plays a vital role when you're showing vacant property. Know who you are dealing with. Insist that you have information recorded both at the office and with you about the client.
- Notify a colleague of your schedule and whereabouts.
- Be sure your cell phone is serviceable in the area in which you are showing the property.
- When the property is vacant, be aware of the time of day you are showing the property. Showing a property at dusk or after dark, with no electricity on in the space you are showing, is not advisable.
- Get to know all prospective clients before showing the property. Use your intuition. If you feel uneasy, have someone else with you, or don't show the property.
- Have policies in place regarding rental collection and disposition of a property. All of the real estate safety practices are applicable in commercial sales and property management, and are even more relevant since you are usually dealing with vacant locations. Be sure you review all the safety awareness procedures and implement the best measures to provide protection from assailants.

(Source: Georgia Association of REALTORS®)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**FIGHT OR FLIGHT?****ESCAPE IS THE BEST SELF-DEFENSE**

**Yell “fire” to get attention.
Run and call 9-1-1 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.

(Source: Washington Real Estate Safety Council)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**PROTECT YOURSELF WITH SELF-DEFENSE SKILLS****Guidelines For Choosing A Self-Defense Course**

Self-defense is much more than learning how to physically attack someone; a good course covers critical thinking about defense strategies, assertiveness, powerful communication skills, and easy-to-remember physical techniques. The instructor should respect and respond to your fears and concerns. Essentially, a good course is based on intelligence and not muscle. It offers tools for enabling a person to connect with his or her own strength and power. Look for a class with a broad focus, which will include information on how to recognize dangerous individuals and situations, how to avoid them and how to react in an attack.

Many health clubs, community colleges and martial arts studios offer these classes. Here are steps you can take to find the best self-defense class for you:

1. Ask family, friends and colleagues if they have recommendations. You'll be surprised how many people are taking or have taken a self-defense course. Ask around and see which classes or instructors they recommend. (You might also find out which programs to avoid.)

2. Make sure you are allowed to watch classes in progress before you sign up. Be wary of any institution that only offers one-on-one, private instruction; it is difficult to gauge the progress you're making if you cannot see your classmates performing the same techniques. In addition, one of the most beneficial aspects of studying in a school is the variety of body types and skill levels of the other students with which you will be working.

3. Meet the instructors. You will rely on these people for your knowledge. Watch to see if they appear genuinely concerned with students' progress. Also check their communication and teaching style to see if these will work for you.

4. Check for safety precautions. When watching possible classes, look for a controlled environment and the use of padded safety equipment. Avoid any place that ascribes to the "no pain, no gain" theory.

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SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS Protect Yourself with Self-Defense Skills CONT.,

5. Look for programs that offer options, techniques, and a way of analyzing situations. Good self-defense programs do not tell an individual what she should or should not do. A program may point out what usually works best in most situations, but each situation is unique and the final decision rests with the person actually confronted by the situation.

6. Empowerment is the goal of a good self-defense program. The individual's right to make decisions about her participation must be respected. Pressure should not be brought to bear in any way to get someone to participate in an activity if she's hesitant or unwilling.

Self-Defense Resources:

Ask Men.com: How to Defend Yourself in a Fight
www.askmen.com/fashion/how_to_150/180_how_to.html

The American Women's Self-Defense Association (AWSDA)
www.awsda.org

Defend University's Principles of Self-Defense
www.defendu.com/wsgi/principles.htm

"Basic Self-Defense for Women" by Kirsten Lasinski
GoogoBits.com
www.googobits.com/articles/1254-basic-selfdefense-for-women.html

Sixwise.com
www.sixwise.com/newsletters/07/09/26/15_key_tips_to_defend_yourself_if_you_ever_must_defend_yourself_in_a_fight.htm

(Source: Defend University)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**SAFETY ON THE ROAD**

As a REALTOR®, you spend a great deal of time in your car. These tips may help protect you from dangerous situations while in your car:

- Your office should keep a file on each agent’s vehicle, including the make, year, model, color and license plate number.
- Whenever possible, take your own car to a showing. When you leave your car, lock it.
- Wear a visible company identification card at all times. 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.
- When you’re alone getting into your car, the first thing you should do is lock the doors. Be observant when approaching your car, looking underneath and in the back seat before entering.
- Keep roadside breakdown essentials in the trunk, including flares, a tire-inflation canister, basic hand tools, spare belts and hoses, water, a flashlight and a first-aid kit. Have your vehicle inspected regularly, keep it well maintained and learn how to change a flat tire.
- Dress for the weather. If your car breaks down or you need to escape a dangerous situation on foot, you could find yourself exposed to harsh weather conditions for an extended period of time. In the winter, bring a coat with you and keep a blanket in the trunk of your car along with some spare warm clothes.
- 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.
- 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’re driving at night and are approached by a vehicle with blue lights, exercise caution. Call 9-1-1 to identify the vehicle, turn on your flashers to acknowledge that you see the police car, and keep moving until you’re in a well-lit area. A legitimate law enforcement official will understand your caution.

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SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS Safety on the Road CONT.,

- 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.
- Avoid aggressive drivers. Don't create a situation that may provoke another motorist such as tailgating or flashing your lights. Use your horn sparingly, and if you are being followed too closely, move over and let the driver pass you. If you do encounter an angry driver, avoid eye contact and give them plenty of room. If you are concerned for your safety, call 9-1-1.

Parking Lot Safety: Don't Become an Easy Target!

- Don't approach your vehicle if a van or other large vehicle with tinted windows is parked next to it. Find a security guard to walk you to your car, or look for a nearby couple walking to their car and say something like, "That vehicle wasn't there when I parked. Would you mind making sure I get into my car safely?"
- Have your key ready to open the car door. Never stand next to your car searching through your purse. Robbers, car-jackers and sexual predators all watch for this type of distraction.
- Once in your car, lock the doors immediately.
- Get moving. Don't sit inside of your vehicle adjusting the stereo, rummaging through shopping bags or your purse, or talking on your phone, especially if the lot is not well populated.
- If you have an unlocking button or keyless entry system, make sure you unlock only the driver door. Unlocking all doors allows a predator to simply slide into your car from the passenger side.
- Make sure that your dome light is always functioning properly. As you unlock your vehicle at night, glance into the back seat and make sure that an attacker has not gained access to your car.

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SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS Safety on the Road CONT.,**Auto Accident Scams**

An apparent auto accident may not be an accident at all, but rather a scam. Learn to recognize auto accident scams to help prevent you and your family from becoming victims.

Swoop and Squat - Two vehicles work as a team to set up an accident. One vehicle pulls in front of an innocent driver and the other alongside, blocking the victim in. The lead car stops short, causing the victim to rear-end him. The car that pulled up alongside serves as a block and prevents the victim from avoiding a collision.

Drive Down - As an innocent driver tries to merge into traffic, the suspect driver yields, waving on the other driver. As this innocent driver merges, the suspect driver intentionally collides with the victim and denies giving him the right of way.

Start and Stop - Stopped in the same lane of traffic, the suspect's vehicle is positioned directly in front of the victim. The suspect starts to move forward as does the innocent driver. For no reason, the suspect vehicle suddenly stops short, causing the victim to rear-end him.

Sideswiping in a Two-lane Turn - At an intersection that has two left turn lanes, the suspect crosses the centerline, intentionally sideswiping the victim's car. The suspect then alleges that the victim caused the collision by entering his lane.

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SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS Safety on the Road CONT.,**ATM Safety**

- Try to plan your visits to automatic teller during the day, rather than after dark.
- Choose an ATM location in a busy public place.
- If possible, take along a friend who can watch the surroundings while you are conducting your transactions.
- Pre-plan your transaction carefully, and don't spend too much time at the machine.
- When you make a withdrawal, quickly place the money in your purse or wallet and leave as soon as you finish your transaction.
- Watch out for suspicious-looking people waiting around an ATM – they may not really be customers. If someone offers to let you go ahead of them, decline politely and leave.
- When visiting a drive-through ATM, keep your doors locked and be prepared to drive away quickly. If anyone approaches your car on foot, roll up your window and drive off.
- If you have not finished your transaction, and a suspicious character approaches you, press the CANCEL button, receive your card and leave quickly.

(Sources: REALTOR® Magazine; Louisiana REALTORS®; Washington Real Estate Safety Council; City of Mesa, AZ; City of Albuquerque, NM; Allstate; Road and Travel magazine; North Carolina Real Estate Agent Safety Guide)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**CELL PHONE SAFETY**

Your mobile phone can be a lifeline for situations from car breakdowns and getting lost on your way to a property showing, to potentially threatening situations. Keep a fully charged cell phone with you during your workday and after work, including while you're showing a property or hosting an open house.

Here are some "do's and don'ts" for making the best use of your cell phone:

- To best prepare for an emergency, pre-program important numbers into your phone. These may include your office, your roadside assistance service or garage, and even 9-1-1.
- In case you are incapacitated in an emergency such as a car accident, you can help responders identify who they should contact by using the acronym "I.C.E.": In case of emergency. Simply enter ICE before the name of the person or people you want contacted, such as ICE Larry. This is becoming an accepted standard across the U.S.
- Be careful with giving confidential information such as bank account numbers over your cell phone. Eavesdropping is a genuine problem for users of analog cell phones and cordless phones. The FM radio signals these phones transmit are easily monitored using readily available radio receivers, commonly called scanners. Digital cellular and cordless phones are dramatically less vulnerable to eavesdropping. Also be aware of your surroundings and eavesdroppers when talking on your cell phone in public.

Using Your Phone Behind the Wheel

The safest tip of all is: Don't make or accept cell phone calls while you're driving. This has been proven to be a distraction and, in fact many states and cities have laws prohibiting using a cell phone while driving. But if you must and are legally permitted to use your phone while driving, follow this advice for best safety practices:

- Keep your hands on the wheel, not on your phone.
- Keep your eyes on the road. Learn how to operate your phone without looking at it. Memorize the location of all the controls, so you can press the buttons you need without ever taking your eyes off the road.
- Practice off-road. If your phone is new, practice using it and the voice mail system while your car is stopped.

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SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS Cell Phone Safety CONT.,

- Use a hands-free model. A hands-free unit lets you keep both hands on the wheel while you talk on the phone. Attach the microphone to the visor just above your line of vision, so you can keep your eyes on the road.
- Stay in your lane. Don't get so wrapped up in a conversation that you drift into the other lane. Pull into the right-hand lane while talking, so you only have to worry about traffic to the left.
- Use speed dialing. Program frequently called numbers and your local emergency number into the speed dial feature of your phone for easy, one-touch dialing. When available, use auto answer or voice-activated dialing.
- Never dial while driving. If you must dial manually, do so only when stopped. Pull off the road, or have a passenger dial for you.
- Take a message. Let your voice mail pick up your calls in tricky driving situations. It's easy to retrieve your messages later on.
- Know when to stop talking. Keep phone conversations brief so you can concentrate on your driving. If a long discussion is required, if the topic is stressful or emotional, or if driving becomes hazardous, end your call and continue when you're not in traffic.
- Know when to pull over. If you need to make a call or answer an incoming call that requires your attention, stop driving. Pull over in a safe and convenient location before taking your eyes off the road.
- Keep the phone in its holder. Make sure your phone is securely in its holder when you're not using it.
- Don't take notes while driving. If you need to jot something down, pull off the road.

(Sources: Canada Safety Council; Spybusters.com)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**THE 10-SECOND RULE**

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 2 Seconds *when you arrive at your destination.*

- 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 a prospect's vehicle?

Take 2 Seconds *after you step out of your car.*

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

Take 2 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 2 Seconds *at the door.*

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

Take 2 Seconds *as soon as you enter your destination.*

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

10 Seconds TOTAL

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

(Appeared in "What You Can Do About Safety," REALTOR® Magazine, September 2000. Courtesy Night Owl/Vector Security, Landover, MD.)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**SAFETY AT OPEN HOUSES**

An open house can be a great sales tool, but it also exposes you to numerous unfamiliar people for the first time. Stay safe by practicing these guidelines.

- If possible, always try to have at least one other person working with you at the open house.
- Check your cell phone's strength and signal prior to the open house. Have emergency numbers programmed on speed dial, and keep your phone with you at all times.
- Upon entering a house for the first time, check all rooms and determine several "escape" routes. Make sure all deadbolt locks are unlocked to facilitate a faster escape.
- Make sure that if you were to escape by the back door, you could escape from the backyard. Frequently, high fences surround yards that contain swimming pools or hot tubs.
- Place one of your business cards, with the date and time written on the back, in a kitchen cabinet. Note on it if you were the first to arrive or if clients were waiting.
- Have all open house visitors sign in. Ask for full name, address, phone number and e-mail.
- When showing the house, always walk behind the prospect. Direct them; don't lead them. Say, for example, "The kitchen is on your left," and gesture for them to go ahead of you.
- Avoid attics, basements, and getting trapped in small rooms.
- Communicate frequently with the office, your answering service, a friend or a relative that you will be calling in every hour on the hour. And if you don't call, they are to call you.
- Inform a neighbor that you will be showing the house and ask if he or she would keep an eye and ear open for anything out of the ordinary.
- 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.

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SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS Safety at Open Houses CONT.,**If you are showing model homes, here are three tips that can help keep you safe:**

- If possible, always try to have at least one other person working with you at the home.
- 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, e-mail, and vehicle information.
- Keep your cell phone and your car keys with you at all times. Keep your handbag locked in the trunk of your vehicle.
- When closing the model homes for the night, never assume that the home is vacant. Check the interior of the house prior to locking the doors, working from the top floor to the bottom, back of the house to the front, locking the doors behind you. Be familiar enough with each home to know the exits. Be aware of your surroundings. Be prepared to protect yourself.

(Sources: Washington Real Estate Safety Council; City of Mesa, AZ; Georgia Real Estate Commission)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**PROTECT YOURSELF WITH A DISTRESS CODE SYSTEM**

An important part of ensuring that you stay safe on the job, on the road and at home is preparing some “safety nets” in advance. One such precaution is having a distress code system in place.

Establish a voice stress code, a secret word or phrase that is not commonly used but can be worked into any phone or in-person 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.

The distress code could be something as simple as “Hi, this is Jane. I’m at [address]. Could you e-mail me the red file?” 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). It may make the most sense for everyone in your office to share a single distress code; this will be easiest to remember for everyone.

The colleague who receives your distress code will be alerted that you may be in danger. With your pre-arranged signal, they will know to call 9-1-1 on your behalf, or, after asking a few careful questions, can arrange to meet you so that you are not alone, or call you back and ask you to leave to respond to an “emergency situation.”

The distress code should be used if you are uneasy, but do not feel you are in danger. If you are in immediate danger, leave the area.

Do not hesitate to call 9-1-1 in an emergency.

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, your colleagues and your family and friends.

(Source: Washington Real Estate Safety Council)

SECTION 3: SAFETY WITH CLIENTS**SHARE SAFETY TIPS WITH YOUR CLIENTS**

Share the safety message with your clients! They, too, can be vulnerable as they allow strangers into their homes, or visit other people's property. Give them this valuable advice to help them protect themselves against crime:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Instruct your clients that they are responsible for their pets. If possible, animals should be removed during showings. Make clients aware that buyers and agents are sometimes attacked, and the owner will be held liable.
- At an open house, be alert to the pattern of visitors' arrivals, especially near the end of showing hours. In some areas, a group of thieves will show up together near the end of the open house and, while a string of "potential buyers" distracts the agent, the rest of the group walks through the house, stealing any valuables they come across.
- Finally, when you leave a client's property, whether after an open house or a standard showing, make sure that all doors and windows are locked. Thieves commonly use open houses to scout for valuables and possible points of entry, then return after the agent leaves.
- Let your clients know that you will take all of the above safety precautions, but that when they return home, they should immediately verify that all doors are locked and all valuables accounted for.

(Source: REALTORSafety911.com; Realty Times; ThinkGlink.com)