

LEGAL HOTLINE QUESTIONS - Keys to Staying Safe



Normally this article is a recap of common Legal Hotline questions and answers. However, September is REALTOR® Safety Month and I can't think of any question that is more important than:

“What can I do as a REALTOR® to stay safe on the job?”

Below are some safety tips, all of which are a part of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® REALTOR® Safety Resources Kit. For more information and helpful safety tips, please visit NAR's REALTOR® Safety Web site at

www.REALTOR.org/Safety.

Showing Properties the Safe Way

When you are showing an empty property, you can take these simple steps to empower yourself against attack or theft.

- 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 SentiLock (www.sentrilock.com) ensures that keys don't fall into the wrong hands.
- 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.
- Try and call the office once an hour to let people know where you are.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

10 Tips for Holding a Safe Open House

Open houses can be a great sales tool—but hosting one also exposes you to numerous unfamiliar people for the first time. Take these steps to stay safe:

1. If possible, always try to have at least one other person working with you at the open house.
2. Check your cell phone's strength and signal prior to the open house. Have emergency numbers programmed on speed dial.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Have all open house visitors sign in. Ask for full name, address, phone number and e-mail.
6. 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.
7. Avoid attics, basements, and getting trapped in small rooms.
8. Notify someone in your 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.

Please remember that the Legal Hotline is available to assist principal or managing brokers and their designated agents between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Please call 1(800) 444-5472 or you may e-mail your question to legalhotline@indianarealtors.com.