


Top Safety Concerns and Incidents Affecting REALTORS®

Guest Post Written by Kelly McKenna, Administrative Assistant at RMLS™!

These are lean and mean times in which we live. REALTORS®  face occupational hazards that simply do not exist in most other industries. A recessed market seems to only encourage more bad behavior from those looking to take advantage of real estate professionals and the susceptibilities within their profession. So to celebrate REALTOR® Safety Month, listed below are some of the more prominent safety concerns reported to us over the years including a short list of scams special to the real estate community.

Lockbox Theft: Regardless of price brackets, there has been a surge of lockbox theft all across the state. Vandals have been known to remove an entire doorknob or guardrail just to get to a lock box. Usually, that's the extent of the damage. The perpetrators cut the shackle with bolt cutters and take it to another location to try the lock's mechanisms, expecting to come back to the property later. Either they are unsuccessful, or the locks have been changed by then.

Unfortunately, there are other times when they are able to access the property. There have been reports of staged houses getting completely cleaned out, down to the copper wiring. It's rotten luck, but is a possibility to always consider when listing a vacant house.

In the event of a stolen lockbox, absolutely have your clients change the locks. Consider putting the lockbox in less conspicuous areas around the property to deter the more impulsive vandals. Staging furniture, timed lights and even house-sitters are great solutions to consider if you are

worried your listing is susceptible to vandalism and theft.

Squatters: This is an extension of people gaining access to vacant listings unlawfully. Keep checking on your listings from time to time, even if there are no showings for the week. Certainly call the police if ever you get the sense that someone is in the house and never enter it until backup arrives.

Other Theft: Open houses, broker tours and regularly scheduled showings have all served as backdrops for theft, particularly that of prescription drugs. Sometimes working alone or in pairs to serve as a decoy, people will rummage through bathroom drawers and medicine cabinets or wherever they think they might find... something. Unfortunately, theft occurs during private showings, too. This is limited to small items like jewelry or a box of checks. Please advise sellers to lock up everything when their house is being shown in any capacity.

Harassment & Harm: General safety precautions such as the buddy system and alerting people to one's whereabouts are essential when meeting with new clients. There have been reports ranging from phone or e-mail harassment to REALTORS® cornered or even mugged at showings or worse. Know your surroundings and limit your vulnerabilities as much as possible when alone or meeting someone for the first time.

Craigslist Rental Scams: REALTORS® are increasingly victimized by individuals taking their listings or photos from the internet and posting them on bulletin sites in attempt to secure deposits from prospective renters. Flag these listings whenever you encounter them and, if you like, contact the FTC and FBI's Internet Crime Center. Find more information at <http://www.ic3.gov/default.aspx> and <http://www.craigslist.org/about/scams>.

Large Homes, All Cash, Quick Escrow...: You usually lose nothing but time and gain only frustration with deals that seem too

good to be true. A prospective buyer claims to have X amount of money, all cash, and needs a quick closing. Everything is perfect until the time comes to submit earnest money or sign papers. Always go on instinct and trust your judgment.

Leads for FSB0 Listings: Someone claims connections with frustrated FSB0's who need REALTORS® or other listing leads and attempts to sell these names for \$10-15 a head. Usually they claim to get their leads through an affiliation with either a reputable brokerage firm or educational institution. The names are either of FSB0's with no interest in working with an agent, or home owners who are not even in the market to sell. Always approach such offers with extreme caution.

Overseas Transactions: People from overseas purchase property all the time. However, scams originate overseas as often as they do locally. It is always a good policy to enter into transactions with people you can see past an e-mail and with verified funding.

Real Estate Scam for Lawyers: Someone will contact a real estate agent expressing interest in a large property. They will then request a recommendation for an attorney to set up a trust for escrow, sending a cashier's check to the attorney for an exorbitant amount of money. After the deal is written, the scammer then rescinds and requests a refund back when the original check was no good in the first place.

The nature of the business of real estate requires REALTORS® put themselves in potentially dangerous situations. Meeting strangers in strange places is business as usual. Please be sure to take precautions at every chance for every scenario. It will work out so much better in the long run. For more information, please contact your local and national associations as well as your local MLS.