

# Summer Safety Reminder: Vacant Listings and Potential Hazards

☒ Complications have continued for agents with vacant listings, as we've heard reported by some subscribers since the last entry in the RMLS™ safety series. Copper, appliances, and staging furniture have gone missing. Squatters have remained a very real problem. It is imperative that REALTORS® take measures to reduce a listing's susceptibility to damage and vandalism.

The NAR Risk Management Committee recently released a video tutorial detailing tools that agents can utilize to better protect their clients and their listings such as Google Alerts and IfThisThenThat.

The following ideas, while perhaps seemingly obvious, might still be useful. The number of vacant, foreclosed, and other distressed properties are declining as the market begins to rebound, but there is still a ways to go.

- Visit the property weekly, making times of your visits sporadic. Do not set a pattern.
- Hire housesitters to either stay at the house or visit regularly if you are not able to.
- Check all locks and entrances to the house, including windows. This is especially important following an open house or showing. I have received several reports of houses being cleaned out after a window was left ajar, or just unlocked.
- Park a car in the driveway. This blocks access to the garage (prime spot for clearing out large items without looking suspicious) as well as gives the impression that

someone is at the house regularly.

- Bring up safety topics and concerns during office staff meetings. Your colleagues might have greater insight or similar experiences to share. Real estate is a word-of-mouth business and keeping the conversation out in the open is a very powerful tool.
- Be aware that copper piping is very susceptible to theft. It is known to happen in existing homes, but new construction sites face the greatest threat.
- Set lights in the house on a timer.
- Don't mention the location of the lockbox in the listing's public remarks. To gain entry to the house, squatters can just as soon pick a lock, but the lockbox has been known to be a target. There have been reports over the years of listings with missing lockboxes, but no damage or theft to the house. Many times vandals take bolt cutters to the shackle and take the box to work on it elsewhere to limit visibility. If that's the case, call the police, change the locks, and consider calling your business insurance agent.
- Don't hesitate to enlist the help of neighbors to keep an eye on the place. It is also in their best interest that the house remains safe!

### **Additional Resources:**

Real Estate: Loss Prevention for Vacant Buildings

Protecting Vacant Real Estate Property

Copper Theft: How to Protect Your Property from Vandalism

Theft and Vandalism Claims Have Carriers on Edge in Vacant Property Segment

To report an incident or concerns to RMLS™, please contact Kelly McKenna at [kelly.m@rmls.com](mailto:kelly.m@rmls.com).