

# 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).

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# Two Commonly Asked Questions

Written by Kelsey Brunson, Communications Specialist

As a member of the Communications Department here at RMLS™, I get asked a wide variety of questions from subscribers. I want to take some time in this blog post to answer two questions that subscribers ask on a regular basis. My thought is that more of you might also have these same questions and might benefit from the answers I can provide.

## How Do I Search for Forms, Documents and Tutorials?

The Forms and Documents menu is home to all of our documents, including (but not limited to) training documents, informational documents, desktop news posts, Market Action reports, and tutorials. You can access the Forms and Documents menu through Toolkit at the top of the RMLSweb screen.

Once you are in our Forms and Documents menu, there are three ways to search for that particular document you are looking for. Below is an image showing you the locations of the three areas you can use for your document search:



- 1) Enter a **keyword, phrase or document number** into the search box.
- 2) Click on a **tag** and get all the documents in that particular category.
- 3) Search the **Forms & Documents Folder Menu**. For example, document folder 1500-1699 in this menu is the Market Action and Statistics Menu, where you can find all of the new (and

archived!) Market Action reports.

## **How Does RMLS™ Calculate Appreciation?**

Another commonly asked question that I receive from subscribers is how to calculate appreciation (or depreciation). Appreciation is a comparison of the average sales price of a specific area between two time periods. Here are some key points to remember about this calculation:

1) **You must compare TWO time periods.** Sometimes I get asked, "What is the appreciation of Portland for the last year?" A more accurate question to ask for this statistic would be, "How has Portland appreciated (or depreciated) from 2009 to 2010?" Or, you could compare one month to the next, such as January 2010 to February 2010. (Notice that we are comparing two time periods here).

2) **You can use the appreciation formula to calculate both appreciation AND depreciation.** Often, subscribers believe that the formula for appreciation is different than the formula for depreciation. In fact, the same formula is used for both of these calculations. Whether the result is a negative or positive number determines if the area's average sales price has appreciated or depreciated between those two time periods.

3) **Document #1745: How to Calculate Appreciation, gives a detailed example of how to use the appreciation formula.** This is an easy formula involving plugging in the average sales price for your two time periods! Take a look at this document; I use it for guidance as well!

If you have any questions, feel free to email [communications@rmls.com](mailto:communications@rmls.com). Or, you can call our Help Desk at 503-872-8002 or toll-free at 877-256-2169. They will be able to answer your question or transfer you to the appropriate department. Thank you!