

52 Safety Tips – Safety is a Year-round Priority

Share these tips with your members every week. This will help keep the lessons of REALTOR® Safety Week fresh in their minds.

All tips are taken from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS'® REALTOR® Safety Week Kit. Direct members to NAR's safety site at www.REALTOR.org/Safety for more information on the important topic of REALTOR® safety.

Tip #1

Secure your home office.

Install a deadbolt lock on your office door, as well as on your exterior doors, so that you can lock yourself in while you call for help. If you work on the second floor of your home, buy a foldaway ladder in case you need to escape from a window.

Tip #2

Take 2 seconds when you arrive at your destination to check out potential dangers:

- 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?

Tip #3

Don't walk ahead of a stranger.

When showing a home, always have your prospect walk in front of you. Don't lead them, but rather, direct them from a position slightly behind them. You can gesture for them to go ahead of you and say, for example, "The master suite is in the back of the house."

Tip #4

Rely on your mobile phone.

Always carry a charged mobile phone—and an extra charged battery, if you use your phone a lot. Clip your phone on and make it part of your everyday apparel for immediate accessibility.

Tip #5**Make the introductions.**

When meeting a prospect for the first time, introduce him or her 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.

Tip #6**Check your credit.**

One of the best ways to protect yourself from identity theft is to monitor your credit history. You can get one free credit report every year from each of the three national credit bureaus: Equifax, Experian and Trans Union. Order from a different bureau every four months. Order your free annual credit reports by phone, toll-free, at 1-877-322-8228, or online at www.annualcreditreport.com/cra/index.jsp.

Tip #7**Practice computer safety.**

Protect the data on your home and office computers. Use passwords with at least eight characters, including a combination of letters, numbers, and symbols. Install firewall and virus protection software and update it regularly. Set Internet Explorer browser security to at least "medium."

Tip #8**Help clients protect their belongings.**

Remind clients who are selling that strangers will be walking through their home. Tell them to put any valuables in a secure hiding place. This includes prescription drugs.

Tip #9**Don't be a victim of road rage.**

Don't antagonize potentially dangerous drivers by mimicking their gestures or aggressive driving. Just let it go.

Tip #10**Find a self-defense class.**

The best way to find a good self-defense class is to learn what is available, and then make a decision. Many health clubs offer some type of class, or you can check your local (or online) Yellow Pages under “self-defense.” You can also ask your fellow REALTORS[®], friends and family if they have taken a self-defense class that they would recommend.

Tip #11**Install an alarm system for your home.**

Consider investing in an alarm system if you don't already have one. If you do, make sure you have a panic button feature you can easily use in the room you use as an office.

Tip #12**Question why someone wants your personal information.**

Whenever you are asked for personal information that seems inappropriate, question the source. Ask how the information will be used and if it will be shared. Ask how it will be protected. Explain that you're concerned about identity theft. If you're not satisfied with the answers, consider going somewhere else.

Tip #13**Check the property before you leave an open house.**

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.

Tip #14**Make some noise.**

Whenever possible, avoid being at the office alone. However if you have to be there by yourself, keep a radio or TV playing fairly loudly in the back room. A station that sounds like real people conversing is best.

Tip #15**Keep doors open while you show a property.**

When you're showing a property, always leave the front door wide open while you and the client are inside. As you enter each room, stand near the door.

Tip #16**Don't share your personal information over the phone or e-mail.**

Legitimate companies don't request account numbers, Social Security numbers and other vital information over the phone or via e-mail. Don't respond to a request to verify your account number or password. Don't give out your personal information unless *you* made the contact.

Tip #17**Practice safety online.**

When shopping online, check out a Web site before entering your credit card number or other personal information. Enter this information only on secure Web pages with addresses that start with "https" and have a closed padlock symbol at the bottom of the browser window. These are signs that your information will be encrypted or scrambled, protecting it from hackers.

Tip #18**Ask clients to help protect themselves.**

Inform clients who are selling that while you are taking safety precautions, and that you've checked and locked the home before leaving, they should immediately double-check all locks and scout for missing items immediately upon their return, in case you've missed any less-than-obvious means of entry.

Tip #19**Be prepared for road dangers.**

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.

Tip #20**Take an all-inclusive self-defense class.**

Find a self-defense class that covers more than physical moves. Many classes teach students how to avoid being a target in the first place by adopting the right appearance and behavior.

Tip #21**Install good locks on your home.**

Your home should have deadbolts with full one-inch bolts on all entry doors in addition to existing locksets. Any door with glass panels within three feet of the lock should have a double-cylinder deadbolt, which requires a key on both sides.

Tip #22**Choose flight over fight.**

While every REALTOR® should take a basic self-defense course, the primary goal in any threatening situation is to escape from immediate danger and call for help.

Tip #23**Enlist the help of a nearby neighbor.**

Inform a neighbor that you will be hosting an open house, and ask if he or she would keep an eye and ear open for anything out of the ordinary.

Tip #24**Report harassing calls.**

If you are experiencing harassing phone calls, report them immediately to your employer and to the police. If you suspect you're a victim of telecommunications harassment, report the facts to the police.

Tip #25**Park smart.**

When showing property or meeting someone, park your car in front of the property rather than in the driveway. You will avoid having your car blocked in, you'll have an easier time escaping in your vehicle, and you will attract lots of attention running and screaming to your car at the curb area.

Tip #26**Don't share your Social Security number.**

Keep your Social Security card at home, in a safe place. If your health plan (other than Medicare) or another card uses your Social Security number, ask the company if you can provide a different identifier, such as phone number or birth date.

Tip #27**Skeptical of an e-mail request for information?**

Before you act on an e-mail request, check a list of the latest e-mail scams on the Federal Trade Commission's Web site at www.ftc.gov/bcp/menu-internet.htm, or on the Hoax Busters site at www.hoaxbusters.org.

Tip #28**Shred your personal papers.**

Thoroughly shred all papers with personal information before you throw them away. Shred unwanted credit card applications and "convenience checks" that come in the mail, credit card receipts with your account number, outdated financial papers and papers containing your clients' personal information.

Tip #29**Stay safe in your car.**

When you're alone getting into your car, the first thing you should do is lock the doors. Be observant when approaching your car; look underneath and in the back seat before entering.

Tip #30**Use professional, polished marketing materials.**

All of your marketing materials should be polished and professional. Don't use "glamour shot" photography or other personal enticements in advertising, on the Web or on your business cards. There are many documented cases of criminals actually circling photographs of their would-be victims in newspaper advertisements.

Tip #31**Always have your mobile phone handy in your home office.**

Even when you're using a regular telephone in your home office, keep a fully charged mobile phone with you, just in case. Program your emergency phone numbers onto your office line as well as your mobile phone.

Tip #32**Take two seconds as you walk towards your destination to check out potential risks.**

- 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?

Tip #33**Take notes for safety.**

When prospects begin to arrive at an open house, take a moment to write down their car descriptions, license numbers and physical descriptions and put your notes somewhere safe, like inside a kitchen cabinet above eye level.

Tip #34**Keep your office locked up tight.**

Secure all unused doors and windows at your office, especially if they are in the rear of the office and out of sight and earshot.

Tip #35**Plan ahead with a distress code.**

Establish a voice 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. Example: "Hi, this is Jennifer. I'm with Mr. Henderson at the Barkers' house. Could you e-mail me the RED FILE?"

Tip #36**Keep an eye out for tampering with your bills and bank accounts.**

Open your credit card bills and bank statements right away. Check for any unauthorized charges or withdrawals and report them immediately. Call if bills don't arrive on time. It may mean that someone has changed contact information to hide fraudulent charges.

Tip #37**Stay in touch.**

Always let someone know where you are going; leave the name and phone number of the client you are meeting and let your office know that you will check in every hour on the hour.

Tip #38**Watch out for open house scams.**

At an open house, be alert to visitors' comings and goings, especially near the end of showing hours. Police have reported groups of criminals that target open houses, showing up en masse near the end of the afternoon. While several "clients" distract the REALTOR®, others go through the house and steal anything they can quickly spirit away.

Tip #39**Don't get lost.**

Know where you are going. Study a map to find the location(s) you must drive to. Plan your route yourself; don't assume a client's directions are accurate.

Tip #40**Avoid getting robbed.**

If you carry a purse, lock it in your car trunk before arriving at an appointment. All REALTORS® should 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.

Tip #41**Get expert advice on home security.**

For a detailed security analysis of your home, contact a bonded professional locksmith who is an accredited member of a national locksmith association. At no cost to you, your police and sheriff's department will be glad to help when needed.

Tip #42**Don't get too personal.**

Limit the amount of personal information you share on the job. Use your cell number, not your home phone. Use your office address rather than your home address—or list no address at all. Giving out too much of the wrong information can make you a target.

Tip #43**Ask the local police to check on you.**

When planning an open house, call the local police department and ask them to have a squad care drive by during your open-house hours.

Tip #44**Keep a clear line of sight into your office.**

Keep the windows and counters of your office clear so that people can see inside. Don't make it easy for robbers to help themselves to your valuables or office equipment in broad daylight.

Tip #45**Check out your clients.**

When you have a new client, ask him/her to stop by your office and complete a Prospect Identification Form. Also, photocopy their driver's license and retain this information at your office. Then call their references, verify their employment and current address.

Tip #46**Don't send personal information in e-mail messages.**

Don't send any vital or private information via e-mail. Keep in mind that unlike Web sites, e-mail is *never* secure.

Tip #47**Take two seconds to pause and look around as you enter your destination.**

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

Tip #48**Model behavior for showing model homes.**

When a person comes through the office to view your model homes, have them complete a guest register that includes making a copy of their driver's license. Immediately fax their information back to the main office.

Tip #49**Be prepared for car trouble.**

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.

Tip #50**Protect the perimeter of your home.**

Prune any shrubbery that hides doors or windows. Remove tree limbs that allow access to reach second story windows.

Tip #51**Deter unwanted visitors when you're home and when you're out.**

Make sure all your home's porches, entrance areas, and yards are well lit. Turn on exterior lights when you're home at night, plus interior lights when you're away in the evening.

Tip #52**Do an initial walk-through with escape in mind.**

Upon entering an open house property for the first time, check each room and determine at least two "escape" routes. Make sure all deadbolt locks are unlocked for easy access to the outside.