

Recent Threats a Reminder of Need for Agent Safety

By J. Lennox Scott

There have been recent reports of a man posing as a potential buyer who is contacting female real estate agents in the Puget Sound region and asking them to meet him in remote or vacant properties. Thankfully, none of the agents have agreed, potentially saving themselves from harm and even death. This type of threat is an all too vivid reminder of the murder of Realtor Mike Emert in Woodinville seven years ago. His death sparked a nation wide focus on Realtor safety which has now become a very prominent part of the practice of real estate.

Many real estate professionals choose to go into the real estate business because they enjoy the personal interaction with other people. However, an unfortunate reality for agents is that their profession can put them in danger if they don't follow some common sense safety precautions. The very nature of real estate often puts agents in one-on-one situations with people that they hardly know. Therefore, agents who are aware of basic safety guidelines can avoid potential conflicts and maintain a positive, safe business environment. Home sellers are also well-served to be informed of certain safety measures for the sake of their home and their agent's safety.

In an effort to provide agents with the tools and information that they need to maintain a safe work place, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) established Realtor Safety Week, which will take place during the week of September 9 through September 15. "Every day Realtors across the nation put themselves in positions where they can be victims of dangerous crimes," said Pat V. Combs, 2007 president of the National Association of Realtors. "Empowering Realtors to recognize risks and protect themselves can make the difference between life and death."

In partnership with the National Association of Realtors, the Washington Real Estate Safety Council created a personal safety guide for agents, which outlines several precautionary measures they can take to protect themselves from potential danger. Local real estate companies are taking additional actions of their own to protect their agents. For example, agents are advised to never make an appointment with anyone unless they have taken the proper measures to verify the person's identity and contact information. Real estate agents are also encouraged to meet prospective clients at their office instead of at the home. That way other people within the office can meet the client and identify who they are. Many companies are also beginning to photocopy client's identification information, such as a driver's license, before they can be shown a home. Each of these measures is intended to discourage an attack and protect agents from potential danger.

The Washington Real Estate Safety Council's personal safety guide also advises real estate agents to tell someone when they're going on an appointment—and when possible, to let the client know that they have shared this information with someone. Agents are also encouraged to select pre-assigned code words so that they can alert an associate or their office to an emergency situation.

Personal safety can be an uncomfortable subject, but it's one that we should all be aware of and well-informed about. Real estate professionals who are aware of some basic safety guidelines can significantly improve their chances of not being a victim of crime. For more information on real estate safety, contact your local real estate office or go to www.warealtor.com/safety.

REALTOR® J. Lennox Scott is the Chairman and CEO of John L. Scott Real Estate. You can visit his website www.johnlscott.com.

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For More Information Contact:
Shelley Rossi
Director of Public Relations
John L. Scott Real Estate
206-230-7627
shelleyro@johnlscott.com