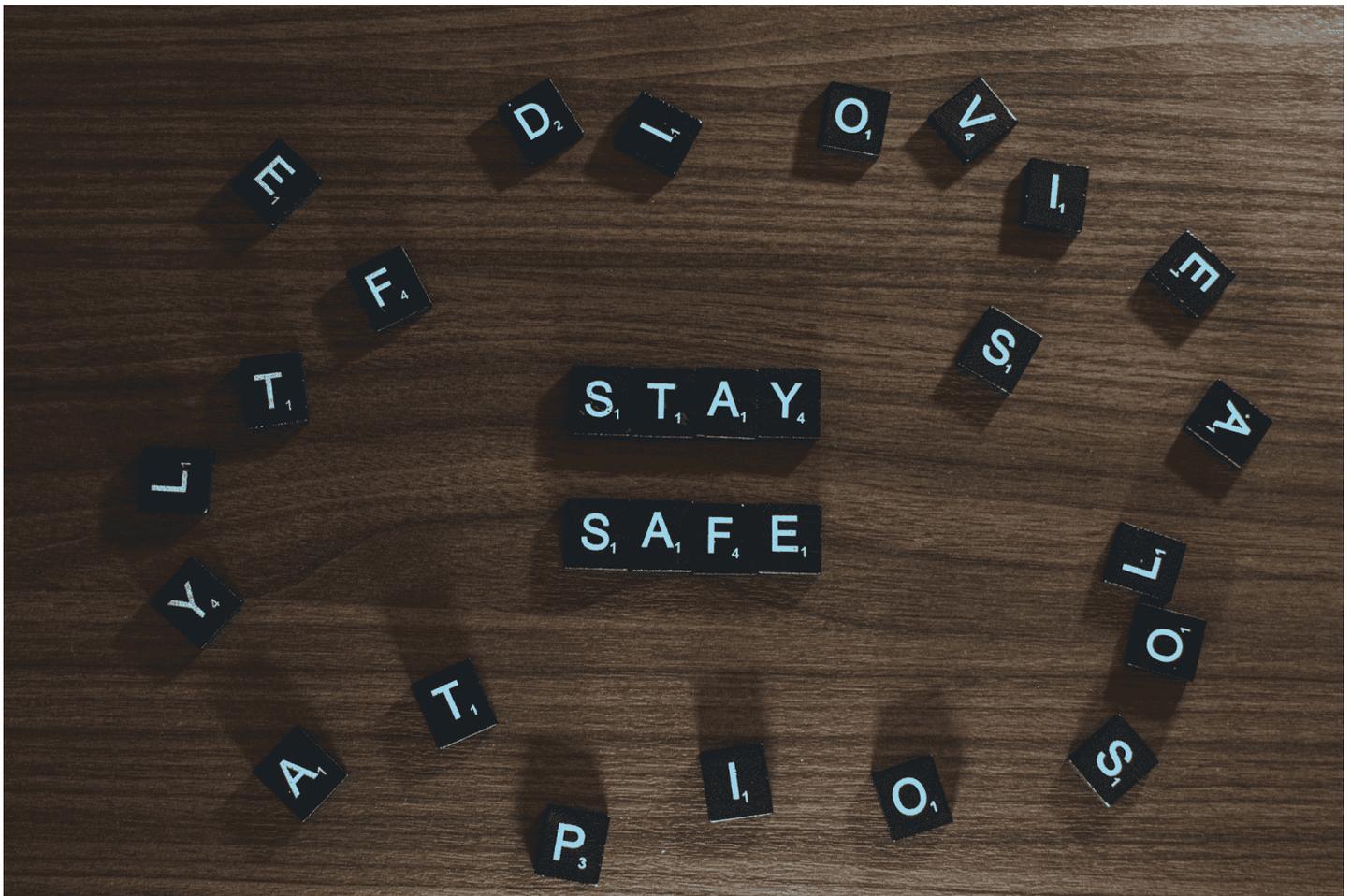


September Health and Safety Awareness

While September has been designated REALTOR® Safety month, it's important to keep safety as a priority all year round.



For 12 years, the National Association of REALTORS® has provided information and tools to promote REALTOR® Safety during the month of September and throughout the year. Take time this month to consider how safe—or unsafe—you are as a real estate practitioner during the course of a typical day.

According to the National Association of Realtors' 2019 Member Safety Report, [33 percent of Realtors](#) have experienced a situation that made them feel worried about their safety or their personal information. That same study shows that less than half of Realtors carry some kind of self-defense on the job, revealing how inadequately prepared most agents are for dangerous situations.

So why isn't there more concern among agents about their own safety?

Tracey Hawkins, a former real estate agent who's taught agent safety for 24 years through her company, [Safety and Security Source](#), says the lack of conversation and preparation is a result of people not prioritizing safety until tragedy strikes.

So why isn't there more concern among agents about their own safety?

"People think it's not going to happen to them, or it's not going to happen in the area they live in," Hawkins says, but the truth is that it can happen to anyone at any time. "It's someone else until it's not someone else."

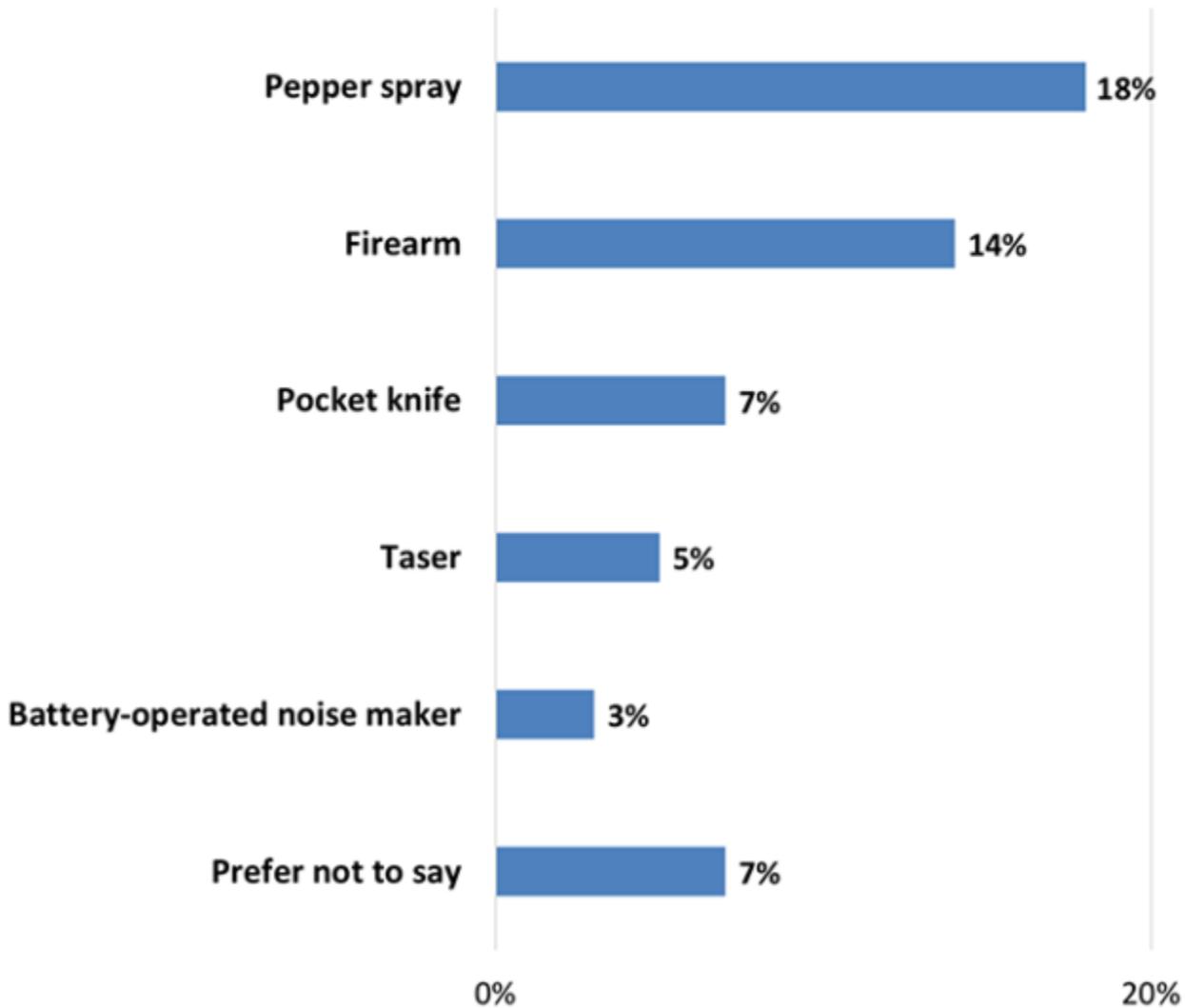
Hawkins urges agents to think more about safety and be realistic about what your job entails: being a real estate agent often requires you to meet complete strangers in an empty house. When you think about it in those terms, it makes sense that one of the jobs with the [highest risks of death by violence](#) is property and real estate management, according to statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor. Real estate agent safety can no longer be an afterthought

How can agents like you stay safe on the job? Make personal safety a priority and put these seven safety tips for Realtors into action.

- 1. Trust Your Instincts**
- 2. Stay Alert, let your walk first into each room**
- 3. Self Defense Weapons, know the options, their use and the rules**

Self-Defense Weapons

Forty-four percent of members choose to carry self-defense weapons. The most common self-defense weapons carried are:



- 4. Always let Co-workers and Family know where you are at all times
- 5. Use technology & tools to prioritize safety.



In addition to person-to-person communication, there are a number of tools and apps that can help you prioritize personal safety on the job.

When it comes to safety apps, Hawkins has a few crucial criteria: longevity, location, and life. Here's why:

- **Longevity** – In her years as a safety expert, Hawkins has seen many different apps come and go. She recommends you use apps that have been around for a while because they're less likely to go out of business and disappear from the app stores. If that happens, you'll lose access to technical support if the app stops working and it won't be updated as technology improves.
- **Location** – The app should have a GPS locator that lets others know where the phone is at all times, so that others can see your location in case of an emergency.
- **Life** – Hawkins says the most important criterion is the human element. The app you use *must* have a way to contact another person who can then call for help or alert authorities if necessary.

In addition to smartphone apps, Hawkins recommends a device called [POM](#), which stands for Peace of Mind. POM goes on your keyring and has a button with two modes.

- The first mode, triggered with a triple click, is an emergency alert that immediately sends your location to a dispatcher and allows you to speak to the person who receives your alert.
- The second mode, triggered with one click, is customizable. You can program it to fake call yourself, send a pre-written text with your location to a designated contact, or start a call and send your location to a designated contact.

POM currently costs about \$60, and there's an additional subscription fee for the on-call services.

Hawkins says she regularly hears agents recommend an app called [Life360](#). It's available for download on [Google Play](#) and [Apple's App Store](#). With Life360, you can create an invite-only circle and share current and recent locations, get alerts when someone leaves or arrives at a saved location, and send one-tap location alerts to the group if you feel unsafe. All of these features are free of charge. For an additional monthly charge, you can also access crime reports, roadside assistance and crash detection.

The NAR [also has a list](#) of agent safety apps/tools on its website, though the small print says that the NAR hasn't vetted the products listed.

Background checks should be multi-tiered and include information from multiple sources. Both sellers and prospective buyers need to be verified and vetted using Google and other online search engines, as well as [safety apps](#) such as Real Safe Agent and Forewarn. Other great information resources include [LexisNexis](#) and your local county judicial website.

Goldstein of Real Safe Agent advises against having false confidence and letting your guard down based on screening apps alone.

- 6. Educate yourself through Self Defense Training**
- 7. Create a safety plan and get your Office involved.**

[Related Article: [9 Top Real Estate Safety Apps You Need to Know About](#)]



Take Precautions Against the ‘Unknown’ Client

Sondra Sattani, with DPR Realty LLC in Scottsdale, Ariz., recalls a showing appointment she scheduled with a client to view a vacant REO property in Phoenix. Sattani arrived early, so she decided to go in and take a look around before her client arrived. She locked the front door behind her as she proceeded to view the interior of the home.

“I was on the second level when I heard the doorknob turning, and the sound of the doorknob and door being pushed back and forth,” Sattani says. “I thought for a minute it may be my client, but why wouldn’t he just ring the doorbell?”

As she walked down the stairs, she peeked through the window blinds to see two men standing at the front door. She was initially unsure of how to react — what if they were able to push the door open? She couldn’t escape out the backyard since the yard had a 6-foot wall and a padlocked gate. Just then, her client arrived, driving up to the home, and the two men fled in a car.

“I now never enter a vacant home alone,” Sattani says. “I wait in my car for my clients to arrive. Sometimes it’s an unknown client that is the concern. These men must have seen me enter the home alone and tried to get in. Thankfully, nothing transpired, but I was definitely frightened enough to never do that again.”

Speak Up

Ana Trinke, with Home Visions Realty in Spring Hill, Fla., recalls an encounter as a rookie real estate agent that forever changed her perspective on safety. A big focus of her job back then was reaching out to for-sale-by-

owner listings. One day, she made contact with a FSBO who said he was tired of trying to sell his home himself. He asked her to come by to do a CMA on his home, which she agreed to.

“It turned out that he used the FSBO sign [on his property] to lure female agents who ‘sounded’ good to him by phone, and then once you were inside, he would attempt to attack you,” Trinique says. “I managed to run out of that house and get into my car and leave.”

Trinique was reluctant to report the incident, though, because she was scared it would turn into his word against hers, with no witnesses. But she was unable to shake the incident from her mind and her peers prompted her to notify the REALTOR® association, which in turn issued a warning to others on the MLS bulletin.

“It flushed out other women who had experienced the same thing,” Trinique says. “I am glad now that I did report it, but it was very upsetting. This experience early on in my career taught me to be very careful. I now Google people and always let someone know where I am and my schedule. I listen to my inner voice and have walked away from listings if I did not feel right about the person.”

Being Proactive

After losing a coworker, Kathleen Cosner, with Cutler Real Estate in Kent, Ohio, never looked at safety on the job the same. In 2010, Cosner’s coworker Andy VonStein was shot in the chest and left in the basement of a vacant home after a former client perceived a deal having gone bad. That same week, in an unrelated incident, another real estate professional, Vivian Martin of Youngstown, was murdered while showing a property. The deaths reminded Cosner of the dangers that lurk.

She now uses safety mobile apps (see [How to Use Your Smartphone as a Weapon](#)) and she makes a point to look up people, phone numbers, and even companies prior to meeting with any client. She’ll copy driver’s licenses and write down license plate numbers, and on every showing, she’ll call someone from the road to let them know where she is and whom she is with. She’s taken safety and self-defense courses too.

“Some of these things may seem overreactive or paranoid-ish,” Cosner recently wrote in an article at [AgentGenius](#). “If we have to be a little paranoid, if we have to take the time to research before rushing out and showing properties to people we don’t know, then so be it. Safety is no accident. Preventing even one violent crime is worth taking a few minutes to think about what we’re doing before acting.”

Make a Phone Call to Safety

Sandra Ware, with Grubb & Ellis Co. in Wilmington, Del., was a rookie real estate agent when she was asked to show a seasonal home near Rehoboth Bay.

“It was a walk-in client and I was doing floor duty,” she recalls. “I ended up transporting two men in my car. They told me that they lived in a group home in a nearby city. They claimed they wanted to buy a year-round mobile home in a resort area to gain their independence. They had chosen an older mobile in a seasonal neighborhood and had the ad in hand.”

When they arrived at the home — which was in a deserted cul-de-sac — Ware sensed nervousness among the two men, which, in turn, made her uneasy. She told them to go ahead and look around the outside of the house, while she then went ahead and unlocked the vacant home for them.

Meanwhile, “I then called my office and told them to keep me talking and not to hang up,” Ware says. “I told them my exact location.”

The two men asked Ware to show them the inside of the home, but instead, she told them to go ahead in, claiming she had to stay outside to take the phone call. She remained at the roadway entrance and stayed on the phone to her office the entire time.

“I firmly believe that the two men had planned this trip out in advance, with less than good intentions, although I had no firm evidence,” Ware says. “Having the cell phone saved me, and having another person stay on the line while I felt uncomfortable, made a huge difference for me and for my safety.”

Something Just Didn't Feel Right

“We have instincts for a reason,” says Anne Meczywor, with Roberts & Associates Realty Inc. in Lenox, Mass. It's her instincts that she believes helped her avoid a possible dangerous situation when working late at the office one night.

“I was writing an offer late one night and the buyers had left,” Meczywor recalls. “Of course, I carefully locked the doors before I went back to fax the offer and call the listing agent. I got ready to leave — keys in hand — when I just didn't feel right. From an upstairs window, I looked out across the parking lot and saw absolutely nothing unusual, but I couldn't shake the feeling.”

Meczywor worked in an office building downtown and the parking lot abutted a gas station. She contacted the police department's non-emergency phone number to ask if they had any patrols in the area that could swing by as she walked to her car, since she was alone and it was late at night. A patrol car arrived minutes later to escort her to her car.

“Two days later, the gas station was robbed at gunpoint,” Meczywor says. “It is very possible the property was being watched by the robbers that night, but I have no way of knowing for sure ... thankfully.”

Seeing the Light

A few years ago, Gunna Voigt, with Coldwell Banker Frascatore Realty in Shelton, Conn., went on a showing appointment of a free-standing remodeling office building with two men she had never met before. The men were physically imposing, at 6'4" and more than 200 pounds each.

“Suddenly, the lights went out, and all you could see was the moon through the two skylights,” Voigt says. The situation had Voigt feeling uneasy and vulnerable, to say the least.

Through the dark, she then saw two hands raised in prayer and the men saying, “Praise the Lord, I can see the Lord!”

“It turned out the two clients wanted to rent the building to start a church,” Voigt said, relieved at the time. “Lesson learned. Don't go into vacant buildings with people you have never met before, especially after sunset.”

Bottom line: Agents should be vigilant & intentional about personal safety.

Safety will be an issue for real estate agents as long as you're regularly meeting strangers in empty houses. While there's no way to guarantee that malicious people will stop targeting agents, you can reduce the chances of having dangerous encounters with an intentional approach to personal safety, by staying alert at all times, using the tools and safety devices available to you, and making self-defense training a priority.

(LEARN MORE)

<https://www.nar.realtor/safety>

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