

Putting REALTOR® Safety First

A Case for Modifying MLS Fields Standards
to Increase REALTOR® Safety



White Paper Report

Presented by the National Association of REALTORS®



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The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions or policy of the National Association of REALTORS®, its members, or affiliate organizations.

HELPING REALTORS® STAY SAFE IN THE FIELD

It is the sad truth that REALTORS are victims of crimes every day in the U.S.— a stark reminder of the unique risks faced by those in the real estate profession. The National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) is wholly committed to helping members stay safe from all types of criminal activity, and works continuously through a multi-pronged strategy to tackle this complex and widespread problem.

More than a decade ago, NAR launched the REALTOR® Safety Program to educate members about the potential risks they face on the job. As part of ongoing efforts to increase safety, NAR offers a wide array of resources, including:

- REALTOR® Safety Grants for associations
- REALTOR® Safety Network to share alerts via social media when a physical or cyber threat to REALTORS® warrants national attention
- Webinars and videos on REALTOR® Safety presented by industry experts
- Weekly social media messaging
- Real Estate Safety Matters course
- Safety materials, including forms, protocols, and best practices

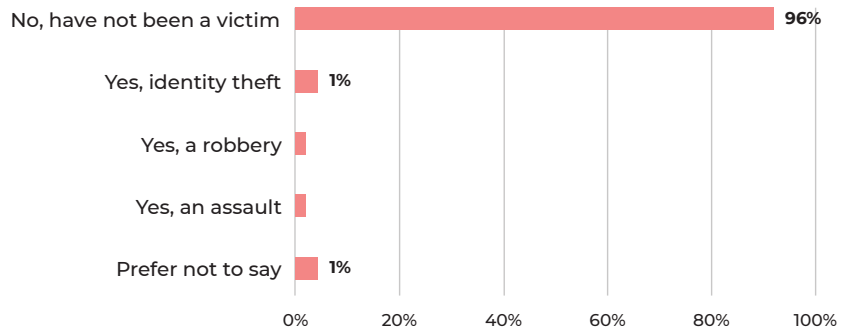
In 2020, the REALTOR® Safety Advisory Committee became a formal NAR governance structure to heighten the safety culture for NAR members, improve the results of the NAR Annual Member Safety Survey Report, and improve member safety.

NAR's annual REALTORS® Safety Survey and Report

To help NAR develop smarter resources, programs and technologies, and ensure a clear picture of the facts and understanding of the scope of the problem, a Member Safety Survey and Report is conducted every year. In 2020, the survey was sent to 45,019 REALTORS® and 3,007 responded. Some of the results of the 2020 survey are represented in various charts included in this white paper.

VICTIM OF A CRIME WHILE WORKING

- 4% were victims
- 56,000 REALTORS® based on 1.4 million NAR members



Source: 2020 NAR Member Safety Report pg. 7

WHY ARE REALTORS® AT HIGHER RISK?

As independent contractors, REALTORS® spend most of their time in the field working alone. When hosting open houses or showing properties, they are often meeting with strangers whom they know very little about in unfamiliar locations that they have no control over.

In addition, because part of their job is to market themselves and their services, agents are easily visible on social media and through public advertising, and therefore are easily identifiable. Unfortunately, criminals are well aware of these vulnerabilities and many take advantage of them by carrying out thefts, sexual assaults, or violent attacks against agents. Also, there is a common perception that REALTORS® are wealthy and therefore a good target.

A DANGEROUS MISCONCEPTION

“We all grew up hearing ‘lock your doors’ and ‘be careful at night,’ messages that were reinforced when the real estate industry approached the police for safety training on preventing opportunistic street crimes rather than predatory behavior. We now know from police reports and numerous studies that, with rare exception, crimes upon REALTORS® meet all the classic predatory behavior patterns—**they research, stalk, hunt, and plan to isolate and attack their victim.**”



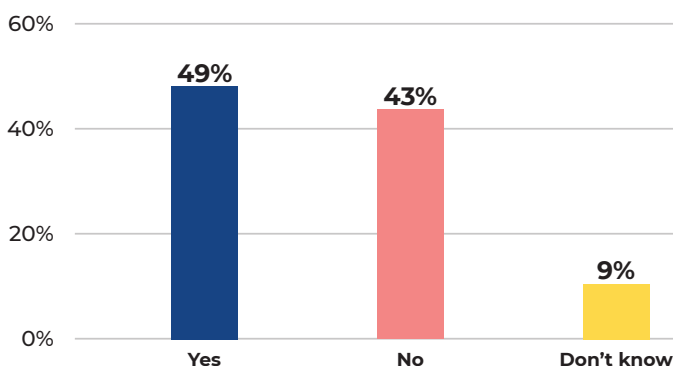
As such, predators are far more dangerous than the average thief looking for monetary gain. Protecting REALTORS® from these criminals is a primary goal of our Committee. Currently, about half of REALTORS® understand this reality, but we want all agents to know about the possibility of attack by a predator so they will take steps to prevent it.



— Dave Legaz

Retired NYPD Sergeant and 2020 NAR REALTOR® Safety Advisory Committee Chair

AGENTS WHO UNDERSTAND THAT CRIMES UPON REALTORS® ARE PREDATORY CRIMES



Source: 2020 NAR Member Safety Report, pg. 9

RECENT VIOLENT ATTACKS ON REALTORS®

Following are just a few examples of some of the many thousands of incidents and horrific predatory attacks on REALTORS® across the country that have occurred over the last few years:

February 2021 – In Pompano Beach, Florida, REALTOR® Stefano Barbosa was kidnapped and murdered while collecting signatures from tenants.

December 2020 – Real estate agent Michael Sodoro was murdered in Omaha, Nebraska, while showing a rental property.

August 2020 – In North Ridgeville, Ohio, an attempted kidnapping was perpetrated against a 54-year-old female REALTOR®.

June 2020 – In Smith Mountain Lake, Virginia, 34-year-old agent Lenora Farrington sustained multiple skull fractures after being ambushed and hit repeatedly with a wrench at an open house.

December 2019 – Monique Baugh, a 28-year-old REALTOR® in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was abducted and killed during a New Year’s Eve showing.

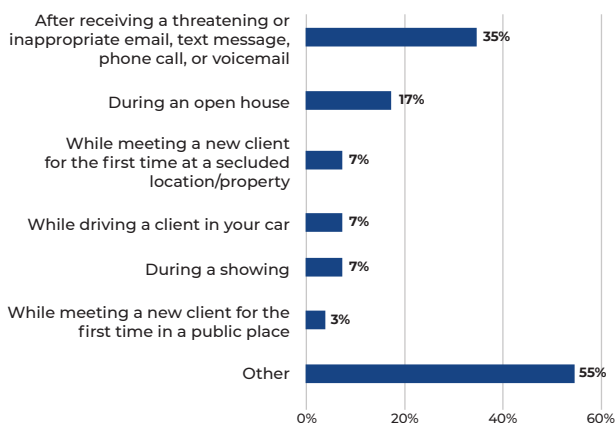
September 2019 – A serial attacker sexually assaulted a female agent during an open house in Encino, California. Other real estate agent victims came forward after security footage showed his identity.

August 2019 – REALTOR® Dawna Hetzler was attacked by a man wielding a knife and bear spray during an open house in Commerce City, Colorado.

April 2019 – A man with a stun gun attacked a female agent at an open house in Tinley Park, Illinois.

December 2018 – After a showing in a vacant model home, REALTOR® Steven Wilson was murdered by a teenager in Hanover, Maryland.

WHERE/WHEN THE CRIME OCCURRED



Source: 2020 NAR Member Safety Report pg. 5









REALTOR® SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The REALTOR® Safety Advisory Committee, which includes safety experts such as retired law enforcement officials, provides member input for NAR's REALTOR® Safety program development and promotion of REALTOR® Safety, identifies and delivers safety best practices, and supports associations and brokerages in implementing their own safety programs.

In an effort to reduce the number of safety incidents that occur in the real estate industry, and after extensive research and careful consideration, the 2021 REALTOR® Safety MLS Fields Work Group was formed with representatives from the REALTOR® Safety Advisory, MLS Tech and Emerging Issues Advisory, and Risk Management Issues Committees to determine the strongest list of MLS Safety Fields to be considered for local MLS adoption to best ensure agent safety.

The REALTOR® Safety Advisory Committee collaborated with the Real Estate Standards Organization (RESO) and the Council of Multiple Listing Services (CMLS) to ensure that all parties are working together as an industry to advance REALTOR® safety.

THE REALTOR® SAFETY MLS FIELDS WORK GROUP RECOMMENDS THE ADOPTION OF A CHECKBOX FOR SPECIFIC SAFETY CONCERNS WITH A FREEFORM FIELD FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:

-  **VACANT** *(if not currently available as a field in MLS)*
-  **NO HEAT**
-  **MINIMAL OR NO EXTERIOR LIGHTING**
-  **MINIMAL OR NO INTERIOR LIGHTING**
-  **REMOTE/LIMITED VISIBILITY FROM ROAD**
-  **ELECTRICITY NOT ON**
-  **INCONSISTENT CELL SERVICE**
-  **OTHER**

The Work Group recommends the inclusion of the following Purpose statement, Fair Housing Statement, and Legal Disclaimer:

Purpose Statement:

The following safety-related fields have been added to reduce the number of safety incidents in the real estate industry. The voluntary information included in the fields is intended to help agents assess the potential safety issues at a property. Agents should take proper precautions, for example, using the buddy system for showings or open houses. This can prevent potential safety incidents, such as a predator luring you to a property.

Fair Housing Statement:

- Remarks must be limited to details about the property so as not to violate state, local, or Federal Fair Housing Laws and protected classes.
- Article 10 of the REALTORS® Code of Ethics, specifically references: race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- Remarks must not include demographics of the neighborhood or any demographic characteristics about the seller, potential agents, or potential buyers.

Legal Disclaimer:

This information is intended for informational purposes only. Neither the listing broker, listing agent nor the MLS makes any warranty or representation about the safety of the property at any time. All brokers and agents must make their own independent decisions, to ensure the safety of themselves and their clients.

COULD IMPROVE SAFETY IN THE FIELD

Armed with information about occupancy, visibility, and lighting, REALTORS® will be empowered to protect themselves and decide when they should bring a colleague with them. Because the predator’s goal is to isolate their victim, in each of the crimes listed on page 3, it is likely that having a second person onsite would have deterred the criminal and prevented the crime. However, since it’s not always possible to have a second person along for appointments, four scenarios that warrant such precaution have been identified.

Agents should always “bring a buddy” when:

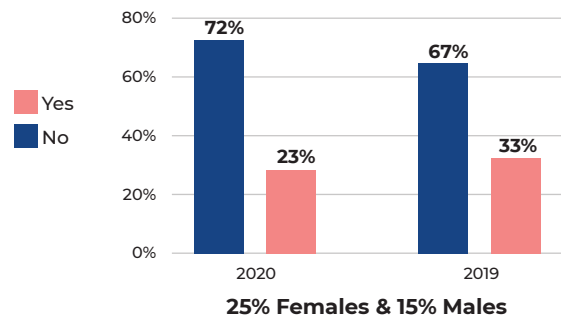
- The property is vacant
- There is poor cell service at the property
- They have an uncomfortable gut feeling prior to the appointment
- They haven’t closed a deal in a while and the desire for the sale might cloud their judgment

HOW DO REALTORS® FEEL ABOUT THEIR SAFETY?

In short, many agents do not feel safe doing their job, and nearly one in four report that they work in fear. Based on a membership count of over 1.4 million, that translates to approximately 322,000 REALTORS® who have feared for their personal safety while on the job. An even higher level of fear, nearly one in three, was reported when hosting open houses or during showings. Though women report working in fear more frequently and are more often the victim of predators, male agents are the victims of crime in one out of three cases.

HOW OFTEN REALTORS® FELT UNSAFE

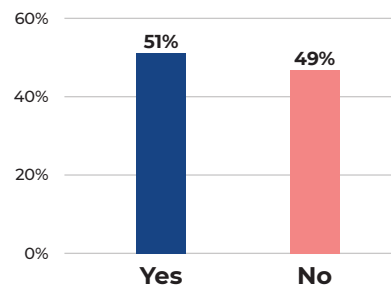
- 23% work in fear
- 322,000 REALTORS® based on the 1.4 million NAR members



Source: 2020 NAR Member Safety Report pg. 4

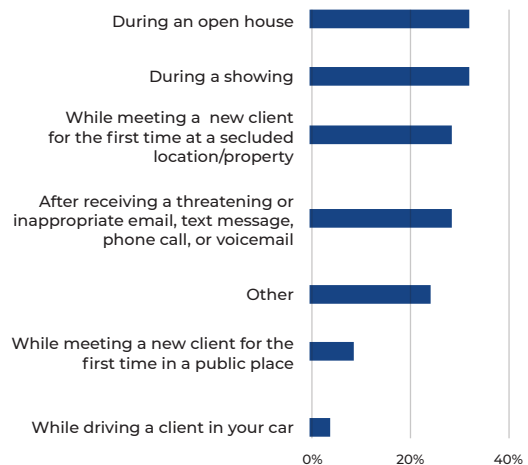
HOSTED AN OPEN HOUSE ALONE

- 51% hosted alone
- 32% felt unsafe



Source: 2020 NAR Member Safety Report pgs. 11 and 12

SITUATION THAT MADE REALTORS® FEEL UNSAFE



Source: 2020 NAR Member Safety Report pg. 5

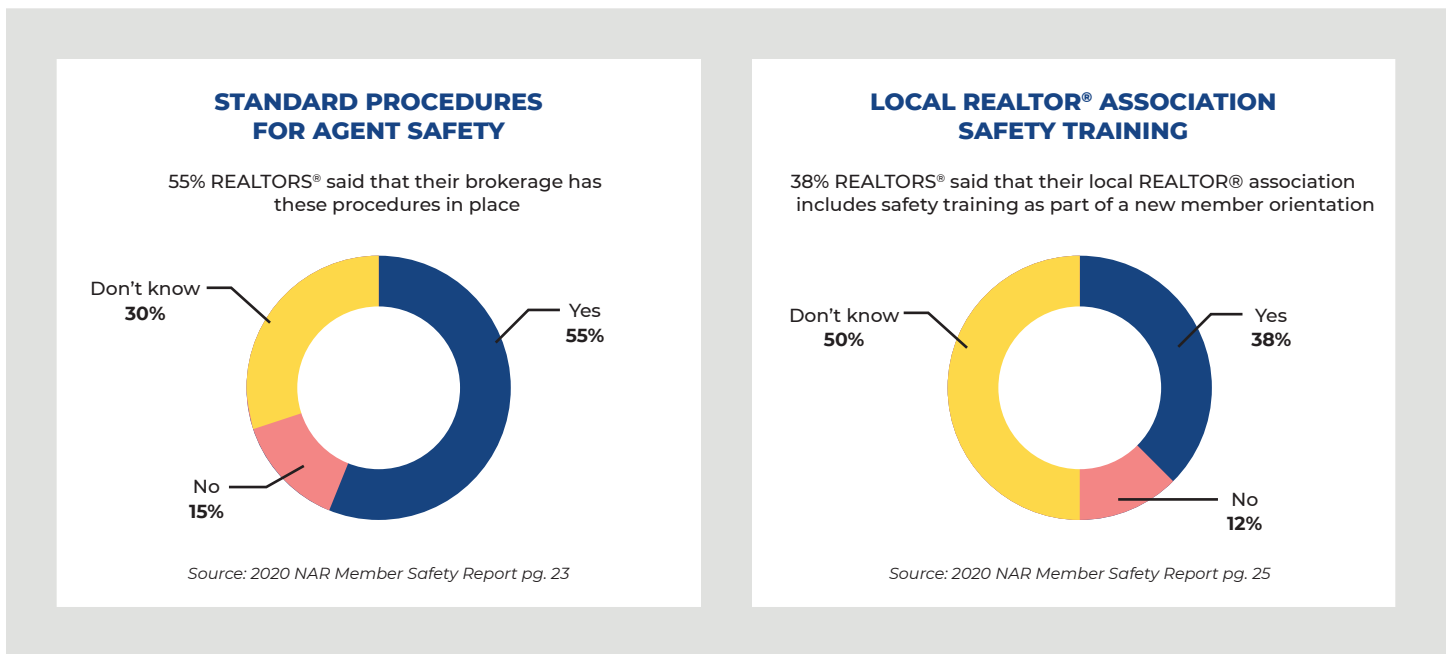
BUILDING REALTOR® AWARENESS

Because of the relationships between brokers and their agents and local associations with their members, they all are in a strong position to impact REALTOR® safety culture through training, education, and robust safety plans. Many brokerages and associations are successfully implementing safety programs, but there is much room for improvement.

Though over half of REALTORS® report that their brokerage has standard safety procedures in place, **45%** say that they don't know or that their office has no procedures. Only **38%** of REALTORS® said that their association includes safety training as part of new member orientation.

It is recommended that all brokerages have a clearly communicated safety plan that is reinforced at every office meeting. Also, all associations should onboard new members with safety training that sets the tone for their membership and helps keep safety top-of-mind.

Resources are available for associations and brokers at nar.realtor/safety.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE REALTOR® SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

- REALTORS® are at risk on the job, and it is our moral and professional duty as an industry to do all that we can to educate members about those risks and help them protect themselves in every way possible. REALTORS® need more safety awareness, training, education, and tools to stay safer at work.
- Among many other measures, modifying the MLS fields will reflect the current realities of the dangers and risks of working in the field and provide a first line of defense against predators and others with criminal intent.
- With these changes in place, agents will be able to utilize crucial information to assess the level of danger they may be facing and decide whether they should ask someone to accompany them to an open house or showing.
- There is no failsafe way to guarantee 100% REALTOR® safety, but being aware of potential dangers and empowering themselves with precautions and preparations will help agents avoid risky situations, dramatically decrease the likelihood that they will become victimized, and could mean the difference between life and death.
- The REALTOR® Safety Advisory Committee is here to support associations and brokerages in providing training, developing safety plans, and instituting other strategies to strengthen REALTOR® safety and keep the issue at the forefront throughout the year. We encourage all brokers and association executives to take full advantage of the many resources available at nar.realtor/safety. Contact safety@nar.realtor with any questions and concerns.

Conclusion

It is the strong belief and considered opinion of the REALTOR® Safety Advisory Committee that the recommended modifications to the MLS fields will increase safety, potentially save lives, and help ensure that every REALTOR® comes home safely each night. We look forward to working with all industry partners to tackle this problem because putting REALTOR® safety first is an issue we all can get behind.



Sources

AEGIS: A Comprehensive Agent Safety Analysis & Guide for Real Estate Associations, MLS, and Brokerages by Lee Goldstein

Safe Selling: A Practical Guide for Preventing the Crime without Sacrificing the Sale, by Lee Goldstein and Dave Legaz

Prospect or Predator? Reduce the Risk of Being Targeted, Presentation by Dave Legaz

2020 NAR Member Safety Report, National Association of REALTORS®



For more information from the National Association of REALTORS®, visit [nar.realtor/safety](https://www.nar.realtor/safety).