



GEORGIA REALTORS® UTILIZE A VARIETY OF METHODS AND TACTICS TO STAY SAFE

Choosing a career in real estate comes with a variety of “pros” that appeal to many— flexibility, independence, and helping individuals make one of the most important and rewarding purchases in their lifetime. But it comes with “cons” as well, and none more prominent than the threat posed by the nature of some of the activities that are necessary for a career in real estate — open houses, meeting prospects on large tracts of rural land, or in empty commercial spaces, to name a few.

Any Google search on “crimes against real estate agents” will yield pages of results. A few times each year, GAR will release “Agent Alerts” via our social media channels, email, and text messages (see sidebar) when we receive news of crimes against agents in Georgia. There are some stories that many are familiar with — Beverly Carter, a REALTOR® from Arkansas who met a prospect at an empty house and was then kidnapped and murdered. Closer to home, in 2003, two Cobb County agents — Cyndi Williams and Lori Brown — were murdered as they worked in the sales office of a subdivision under construction in Powder Springs. In 2016, David Abbasi, a principal with a real estate investment and management firm, was found murdered inside an abandoned property in Woodstock.

These are extreme cases, but criminals taking advantage of the unique situations in which real estate agents often find themselves is a common occurrence. Safety practices are one of the most important components an agent can have in his or her toolbox.

This summer, GAR sent out a survey on safety practices, and more than 1,100 of our members answered. The results were eye-opening. More than half of survey respondents said that they had felt unsafe on the job before, and 39 individuals indicated that they had actually been a victim of a crime while on the job.

Survey Findings

For personal protection, Georgia REALTORS® carry the following:

- **35% // Firearm**
- **27% // A safety or tracking app** on your smartphone (KATANA, PROtect, FOREWARN, Life360, etc.)
- **22% // Mace**
- **3% // An alert device** such as ORA, VALRT or PET (personal emergency transmitter)

Additionally, several GAR members indicated that they carried a knife, and a few mentioned wasp spray due to its long range spray capability, especially when encountering vicious animals. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents do not carry any sort of personal protection items.

More findings include:

- Fifty-five percent of survey respondents indicated that their brokers reviewed safety practices at least once per year.
- While 47 percent of respondents have never taken a self defense class, 35 percent have taken one at some point in their career, and 18 percent have taken one within the past two years.
- Fifty-two percent of respondents have felt unsafe at one time or another on the job.

BRANDIE MINER is the Chief Communications Officer for GAR, and is the Editor of *Georgia REALTOR®* magazine.

Stories from the Trenches

Several GAR members had stories to share. One important theme that kept repeating in the survey comments was that REALTORS® listened to their intuition, and oftentimes did NOT have a story to tell because they followed established safety protocols once their gut told them that something was “off.” The stories below have been edited for brevity and clarity and names have been withheld for privacy.

“I was setting up an open house when a prospective buyer came in with his agent. His agent left and he became upset and aggressive, demanding that I not hold the open house since he had put in an offer. He stayed in the driveway for a long time, and finally left when I contacted his agent, who then called him.”

“At an open house, I had a man who parked on the wrong side of the road and when he came into the house, started talking about rape. I told him that I had extensive self-defense training, as my daughter was a Marine so I didn’t think anyone would want to attempt such a thing. He appeared a bit more nervous once I said that and I changed the subject. Since I had an uneasy feeling about him, I remained in the doorway for the conversation, and soon, two couples showed up to see the house. He left quickly when I started speaking with them.”

“While checking on a vacant restaurant listing with a drive-through, I was confronted by a man exiting the property from the drive-thru window. I demanded that the man leave the property and he did.”

“After the downturn of the market in 2008, my husband/business partner and I specialized in the only thing available to sell — foreclosures. There were numerous occasions where we encountered unhappy (and potentially dangerous) people. On one such occasion, we were sent by an asset management company to post signs on a home that had already been foreclosed on and the title had been transferred to the lender. When we exited our vehicle, signs and tape in hand, and headed for the door, the borrower opened the door and released several large Rottweilers. We quickly retreated to the truck and called the local sheriff’s office for assistance.”

“Had a man call from my sign asking if I could let him in to look at a vacant listing I had listed. He said that he was staying with a friend down the street and he had already looked at the outside and yard, loved it, and wanted to see it the inside. I told him I would have another agent let him in. He kept asking why I couldn’t let him in. I explained that I couldn’t represent him and the seller as clients, so it was best to have someone else show him the property. He said he had cash and was insisting I show him. I sent his number to a male agent in my office. The agent contacted him that same day and he was no longer interested in seeing the house or any other property.”

“I was showing a heavily wooded tract of land in a remote area. I was walking in front of the client and we had walked about a half mile down a dirt trail when he grabbed me from

Agent Alerts

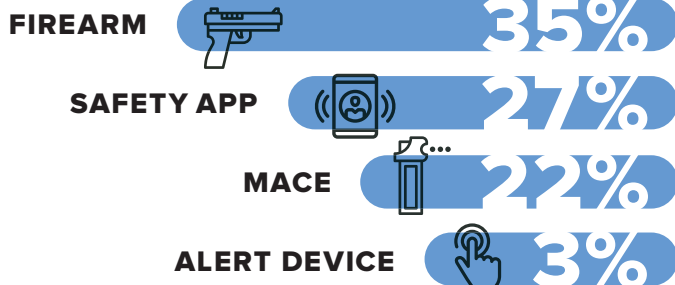


Text messages are the first resource GAR uses when notifying members of Agent Alerts. To opt into receiving our text messages, text “GARealtors” to 866.280.0576. GAR typically sends one to two text messages per month and will never send more than four text messages per month.

behind and started hugging me and kissing me. I slapped him and told him to stop and that the showing was over and we needed to go back to the car. Thankfully, he stopped and we walked back to the car and I drove him back to his office.”

“Several years ago I was checking on an old 300,000 sf mill facility that I had listed for sale or lease. It had been closed for several years and the electricity had been recently disconnected. This being the case, I had to use a flashlight to check things out. As I was walking past a breaker box that I had always used to turn on some lights prior to the electricity being disconnected, I noticed that the cover was missing. Upon further inspection, I discovered that hundreds of feet of old copper wiring had been removed. And to make matters worse, they weren’t finished and had many pounds of wiring pulled out of the ceiling conduit still to be retrieved — thousands of dollars worth. At this point, I realized that they could possibly be in the building and I may have interrupted them. I was in the center of the building and was quite a distance from the nearest exit, which would require me to go around several dark corners in order to leave the building. I was feeling very uncomfortable and pulled my gun out (I always carried a pistol when I went inside this building alone) and exited as quickly as I could. As soon as I got outside, I called the police. Apparently, I was lucky and had gone in prior to their returning for the rest of the loot. It turns out that they

WHAT DO WE USE FOR PERSONAL PROTECTION?



had stolen 75 percent of the copper wiring in the building and were obviously coming back to get the rest, which had already been cut and pulled. This was no petty crime. It was estimated that a million dollars worth of damage had been done and had probably taken several days to finish. It still gives me chills to think about what might have happened if I had arrived a little earlier or a little later.”

“A buyer leaned against my back while I was opening the door. I pretended that my key wouldn’t work and told him we would have to reschedule. He was tall enough that I went under his arm to go to my car. I didn’t reschedule.”

“I had a gentleman request a meeting with him at his home, which he was considering listing. He gave me a bad feeling from the start, and after I did a little detective work, I found out that he was a sex offender and had just been released from prison.”

“I had my dog with me at a vacant listing and he sniffed someone in the basement. We called the police, who came out and found the culprit and took him away.”

Real Tips from REALTORS®

GAR members were happy to share their tips for safety, and oftentimes these tips echoed popular practices that have kept agents safe through the years.

Train for safety.

It recently came to our attention that many of our agents had obtained concealed weapon permits and routinely carried small weapons in their purses, pockets, or automobiles. Realizing that we live in a different world than we did 20 years ago, it was understandable why they felt the need to protect themselves. But we also knew that carrying a weapon and not knowing how to use it can be even more dangerous than not carrying one. So, we hired an expert in gun safety to train our agents on how to use their guns properly and safely. The training was scheduled at a local shooting range on a Saturday morning and was very well-received and attended.

RON B. // TIFTON

Take self defense classes, like martial arts. Sign up for gun training if you carry. Be proactive and take charge of your own safety.

ROBERT B. // CHATTANOOGA

Let someone know where you’re going and how long you expect to be there.

When showing a home, I get there before the client to open the lockbox, turn the lights on and look for an exit strategy in case it’s needed.

MAYRA A. // ROSWELL

Safety in numbers.

I pair up with a lending partner or agent for open houses. My clients tend to come from referrals and are often women,

so I feel pretty safe with them when showing a property. I always lock the door while we are touring the home so strangers are not able to enter in behind us.

ELAINE C. // ATLANTA

It’s prudent to always have a buddy with you whether an open house or showing, never go alone.

IRENE D. // ATHENS

Utilize distress signals.

Have people spot call you and always have a code word for danger. Also, leave your showing schedule with your office.

DONNA D. // SAVANNAH

Dress for (safety) success.

Never wear expensive jewelry and always wear shoes that would allow you to run.

SYLVIA C. // SNELLVILLE

Employ an exit strategy.

Never park in the driveway when showing a home. Park in the street in case you need to get away if you are in danger.

JONATHAN C. // DOUGLASVILLE

I typically follow my clients around in a house and stay between them and the door so that I can exit if I am uncomfortable.

MARY C. // ST. SIMONS ISLAND

Let the buyers go in first (this includes every single room with a door) don’t get trapped between a person and the door.

WILLIAM K. // NEWNAN

Announce your arrival.

When showing homes, never show up unannounced. Always ring the doorbell, knock on the door, and announce yourself as you open the door. Never show a home in which the appointment has not been confirmed with the homeowner.

TRACY C. // BUFORD

Utilize technology.

I use both Forewarn and Life360, and I created a New Prospect Information Sheet to ask for car make and model, and a photocopy of driver’s license for prospective clients.

LISA C. // ALPHARETTA

Definitively identify your prospects.

Always ask for a text copy of the buyer’s identification prior to meeting, to share with broker/team/family, so someone has knowledge of who you’re meeting.

PATTI B. // WOODSTOCK

And finally ... the Golden Rule of REALTOR® Safety

Listen to your gut — if you feel unsafe, LEAVE.

DENE’ S. // ATLANTA

Above all else, trust your instincts. If something doesn’t feel right, it probably isn’t.

ROBERT H. // CEDARTOWN