

10 Steps to a Safe Open House

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Being a real estate agent can be risky. Because a significant part of being an agent involves attracting and meeting with strangers, at least initially, real estate professionals are more vulnerable to criminals than those in many other professions. Check out these 10 safety precautions agents can take on the day of an open house.

1. **Park where you cannot get blocked in.** Be sure to have a clear line of sight when walking back to your car after an open house.
2. **Meet the neighbors.** There's safety in numbers. Introduce yourself to the neighbors, point out your car and invite the neighbors over to the open house.
3. **Advise clients about valuables.** Thefts may result in lawsuits against agents. To forestall this, develop a list of valuables clients should put away before an open house, including mail, jewelry, prescription drugs, extra sets of keys and financial statements, among others. And just to be sure, get to the property an hour before the open house is scheduled to start and do a walk-through with the clients to point out what they need to secure.
4. **Be aware and work in teams.** The number 1 place where agents are attacked during an open house is the front door, partly because lockboxes take time to open. If you are alone, turn your back against a wall to avoid being attacked from behind. Company is better, however. Ask an affiliate, such as a home inspector or title officer, to sit the open house with you.
5. **Establish your escape routes.** Walk around the house and notice how to get in and out of rooms. If there is a fence in the backyard with a gate, unlock the gate for easy exit. And check your cell service before the start of the open house.
6. **Set up for safety.** Hang decorative bells behind every outside door that you have unlocked. These will alert you whenever someone enters the house. Do not bring your laptop to an open house, as it can be easily stolen. Plus signing on to someone's unsecured wireless network can open you up to identity theft. Carry only what you need. Purses go in the trunk of your car *before* you leave your house, not when you arrive. Finally, when picking a room to wait in during the open house, pick the one with the most cell service and escape routes.
7. **Check out your guests as they arrive.** As soon as someone comes in, jump up, introduce yourself and direct guests to a sign-in sheet.
8. **Never, ever turn your back on a prospect.** Let prospects walk in front of you. Both men and women can be violent, so this advice applies regardless of the visitor's gender.
9. **Never go into certain rooms.** When showing visitors around, never go into rooms with no escape routes. These include walk-in closets, bathrooms and laundry rooms, among others. Instead, direct visitors to those rooms.
10. **Close up in teams.** Openings and closings are the most dangerous times during an open house. Often, there is another agent down the street also doing an open house. If you're alone, lock up your house, go over to the other agent and offer to walk through his or her house and close it up with him or her and then both of you can go over to your house to do the same. Working in teams applies to both men and women.