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NEWS


Andrew Peck: "I don't think realtors immediately said, 'I'm not showing houses anymore.'" Photo by Dan Toulgoet.

Real Estate Board issues warning after realtor robbed

By Mike Howell-Staff writer

Vancouver realtors are on the alert after a female realtor was tied up and robbed two weeks ago in a downtown condo by a man posing as a prospective buyer.

The woman managed to free herself but lost credit cards and undisclosed personal items to a suspect described as a five-foot-nine Asian man in his 20s, with gold highlights in his hair.

The robbery occurred on the afternoon of June 27 in the 1400-block Hornby Street. The woman wasn't injured and was able to flag down a passerby on the street to call police.

Though police believe the crime could be an isolated incident, they and the Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver are warning realtors to be extra cautious when showing properties.

"I don't think realtors immediately said, 'I'm not showing houses anymore'-the reaction was more out of concern for the person," said Andrew Peck, first vice-president of the board.

In this case, the victim had received a call from a man who wanted to look at the condo. When she phoned back, she couldn't reach him, but decided to show up for the appointment anyway, said Const. Sarah Bloor, media relations officer for the Vancouver police.

As a result of the robbery, police and the real estate board recommend that when a prospective buyer calls to make an appointment, realtors always get a telephone number and confirm that it's working.

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Real Estate Weekly

If it isn't, they shouldn't make the appointment, said Peck, general manager of Royal Pacific Realty. Similarly, if the "buyer" appears threatening or suspicious in person, realtors should cancel the showing.

"I'm six-foot-one, 260 pounds-I can imagine me showing up and looking really ugly and somebody saying, 'There's no way I'm walking into that house with you,' and I would appreciate that."

Peck said realtors should also tell colleagues and family the addresses of residences being shown and what time they're expected back. If possible, avoid showing a property alone, he said.

To ensure the safety of realtors, real estate boards in the Lower Mainland, the Fraser Valley and Chilliwack are developing a paging system to alert some 9,000 realtors about incidents such as last month's robbery.

Currently, the boards use e-mail and fax to alert realtors of any concerns related to safety. As well, Realty Watch, a crime prevention network of 9,000 realtors, has operated since the 1980s and works like a neighbourhood crime watch. If realtors notice anything suspicious on the street, they're told to call police.

"If you think about it, most people are sitting in their office nine to five, whereas realtors are driving around the city, showing houses," said Peck, noting a "be on the lookout" fact sheet has recently been developed with various police departments.

Bloor couldn't recall any previous robberies involving realtors showing homes, but a female realtor was attacked a decade ago on Vancouver Island while showing a home.

In that case, 52-year-old Kenneth Hibbert was convicted of attempting to murder 48-year-old Janet MacLeod at an open house in Duncan on Oct. 24, 1993. While showing the garage to Hibbert, MacLeod was attacked from behind and beaten to the point where she lost 50 per cent of her blood.

Anyone with information on the Vancouver robbery is asked to contact the general investigation Unit of the Vancouver Police or Crimestoppers at 1-800-222-8477.

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