

## Don't Be a Target for Harassment or Stalking

Real estate professionals have been victims of harassment or stalking behavior from clients and potential clients.

*Harassment* occurs when a person subjects another to alarm by conveying a telephonic or written threat to inflict serious physical injury on that person or to commit a felony involving that person or their property.

*Stalking* is when a person knowingly alarms or coerces another person or a member of that person's family or household by engaging in REPEATED and UNWANTED contact with the other person.

Take these steps to avoid these unwanted behaviors:

- If you are being harassed or stalked, report the offender to your employer and the police immediately.
- All of your marketing materials should be polished and professional. Don't use alluring or provocative photography in advertising, on the Web or on your business cards. There are many documented cases of criminals actually circling photographs of their would-be victims in newspaper advertisements. These victims were targeted because of their appearance in the photograph.
- Limit the amount of personal information you share. Consider advertising without using your photograph, home phone number and/or home address in the newspaper or on business cards. Don't use your full name with middle name or initial. Use your office address—or list no address at all. Giving out too much of the wrong information can make you a target.
- Install caller I.D. on your telephone, which should automatically reject calls from numbers that have been blocked. This will provide you with immediate information about the source of the call.
- Be careful how much personal information you give verbally as well. Getting to know your client does not need to include personal information about your children, where you live and who you live with.
- All agents in your office should use only their first initial and last name on their "For Sale" signs to conceal gender and prevent anyone other than a personal acquaintance or current client asking for you by name.
- Meet weekly or monthly with co-workers and other area brokers to discuss business and safety issues. Share any concerns! If you are dealing with a suspicious customer, take extra precautions to avoid isolation or vulnerability. Discontinue your services for that customer if necessary.
- Maintain a file on past and present suspicious customers and homes.

- Report harassing phone calls to your employer and to the police immediately.
- It's important to tell the caller "never call here again," in order to meet the letter of the law regarding telephonic harassment.

(Sources: Washington Real Estate Safety Council; Louisiana REALTORS® Association; City of Mesa, AZ)