

Local Realtors Say They Will Strengthen Showing Procedures in Light of Assault

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You see their signs, and their pictures are in the paper every Sunday. But Thursday's assault of one of their own has Realtors asking tough questions about their safety and business practices. "Sometimes we let it relax a little bit, because we think that it isn't going to happen in our backyard. It has happened," says Rhonda Tompers, president of the Montana Association of Realtors, "We put out a message to all our members, to watch for things and be very cautious when they're going out for showings at any given time."

Tompers, who sells through Dahlquist Realtors in Great Falls, says her company strengthened its showing procedures in light of last week's attack, creating a form to track the whereabouts of both agents and clients, "to let them know where they're going and when they can be expected back, or not," she says.

But what of open houses, where agents will often see multiple clients at a single time? Tompers says they recommend having two agents in the home during the showing, "for the protection of the sellers, also, and for the protection of the agents that are involved in the transaction."

But there's no way to impose a broad set of rules on agencies, says the president of the Great Falls Association of Realtors Jim Dae, "Somebody said to me, 'well we should not show a property without somebody going with them.' I just don't think that's feasible," he explains, "I take clients out and I'll show them properties for six or eight hours a day, and i don't know of another realtor that could drop what they're doing and go with me."

"But I certainly do hope that it changes our policies, and reminds of the fact that we can be in danger," he said, stressing that even the most stringent procedures may not have prevented last week's assault.

For agent Beth Schoenen, the assault changed how and where she meets clients, especially in the more remote parts of the county, "I'm going to be a lot more aware of making sure that either I have a friend or my husband with me."

21-year-old airman Bradley Crisman is accused of kidnapping and raping an agent who was showing him a house on Upper River Road. The agent told police Crisman duct taped her mouth, tied her hands, and dragged her to a basement apartment, where he assaulted her.

Crisman is expected to appear for a formal arraignment of the charges against him. Like Friday, realtors are expected to pack the courtroom