



FOR IMMEDIATE MEDIA RELEASE  
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## **VIREB launches its Realty Watch/Amber Alert program**

NANAIMO, B.C. – The Vancouver Island Real Estate Board (VIREB) is pleased to launch Realty Watch, a community crime prevention program operating across communities on Vancouver Island north of Victoria.

Nearly 1,200 REALTORS® will assist police as extra ‘eyes and ears’ in their communities.

The prime objective for Realty Watch is crime prevention and emergency assistance to police in the case of missing persons or abductions.

The Realty Watch program has four objectives:

1. to promote crime prevention within the community;
2. to report and alert the local police of criminal or suspicious activities, and to search for missing children or seniors as requested by the police;
3. to promote the crime prevention unit of the local police force and enhance the efforts of other crime prevention organizations such as Neighbourhood Watch and Block Parents; and
4. to uphold the image of the real estate industry within the community.

Realty Watch is a partner agency of Amber Alert.

“Seeing the success of the Realty Watch network across the Lower Mainland, VIREB has been working for several years now to launch its own program,” explains VIREB President Subhadra Ghose. “We’re very pleased to be announcing our program.”

Realty Watch Task Force Chair Trish Widdershoven, herself a REALTOR®, says the program is a co-operative effort between police and the real estate industry to stop crime before it happens.

“Most property crimes are committed weekdays between 10:00am and 3:00pm, a time when REALTORS® are traveling the community streets conducting their regular business routine,” she says.

“REALTORS® are therefore in a unique position to observe crimes about to happen or already in progress. The real estate profession requires travel through residential and commercial areas, giving agents the opportunity to serve as an extra set of eyes and ears for the police.”

VIREB also launched an earlier version of Realty Watch: Home Security program, from 1992-1995.

With the advancement of technology, one of Realty Watch’s key components is the “fan-out” portion of Amber Alert, in conjunction with the RCMP. The background technology utilizes a new internet

based communications system called Touchbase which provides numerous member to member communications and safety benefits.

REALTOR® members don't require any new equipment to be involved, they just have to have a profile with the background system.

Individual REALTORS® will only be able to message other individual members. Any Realty Watch fan-out descriptions must be initiated by police and can only be sent by Board staff to all members.

Corporal Dave Boyce, with Community Policing Services at the Nanaimo RCMP detachment, is excited about the launch.

"The RCMP is grateful to the Vancouver Island Real Estate Board and its membership for partnering with and assisting law enforcement agencies through the Realty Watch program," he says.

"With nearly 1,200 REALTOR® members connected to this program, Realty Watch will be an additional and valuable tool in the search for missing persons. The program works and has been very successful in other jurisdictions in B.C." Boyce says, noting the RCMP continues to engage and partner with people and organizations in communities to make them even better places to live.

REALTOR® members will be receiving brochures, vehicle decals and special Realty Watch business cards with reporting instructions on the back.

The Board is continuing the process of beta testing the system. While still in the pilot project phase, 40% of VIREB's membership has already signed up for the program.

"Over the next two months, we'll be completing beta testing on this technology and encouraging the balance of our membership to sign-up," Ghose says.

### **How a fan-out will work**

Realty Watch is also focused on helping police in emergency circumstances such as attempted abductions, and lost or missing persons.

In this case, the police contact VIREB and request a fan-out – usually for a missing person. Information is sent using a BOLF (Be-On-The-Lookout-For) form.

The information is typed on the emergency fax/e-mail form and sent to the Board Realty Watch contact list. If the form is received after-hours, Board staff attend to it at the beginning of the next business day.

Any REALTOR® who receives that fan-out, and sees or hears anything that could help police with the case is expected to call 911 and ask for the officer in charge of the case to share information.

If the case is resolved, the police again contact the Board who in turn send out a cancellation of the alert to REALTORS® using the fan-out process.

Missing persons fan-out cases are often solved within 6 to 24 hours of the fan-out alert. It is typical to send out a cancellation shortly after sending the initial fan-out.

VIREB represents approximately 1,195 licensed REALTOR® members in more than 85 member offices on Vancouver Island (north of Victoria).

REALTOR® is a trademark identifying real estate professionals who are members of the Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA). REALTORS® subscribe to a Code of Ethics and Standards of Business Practices as set out by CREA. MLS® is a cooperative marketing system used by Canada's real estate boards.

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