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Appraising can be a dangerous profession!

August 11, 2011 - Appraisal & Consulting

For the most part, personal safety is not an overriding issue for the real estate appraisal professional. However, incidences do arise when an appraiser's physical well being is threatened. Recently I was having breakfast with some fellow appraisers and the topic of conversation turned to our safety. We all had stories to tell. One of our group pulled out a credit card sized item. It was a concealed weapon permit.

"You pack heat?" another appraiser asked.

"All the time. Hey, I do a lot of foreclosure work. I'm not going to risk getting attacked by a disgruntled owner," was the reply.

The rest of us stared in disbelief. Apparently the decision to get the permit and carry a weapon was the result of a rather disagreeable encounter with a very unhappy owner who was quite threatening during a foreclosure inspection.

I know one appraiser who jumped onto the hood of her SUV to escape attack by a very aggressive territorial rooster. Another appraiser was threatened by a property owner when she took a photo of his property as a comparable sale. The owner even chased after her in his vehicle once she had left the area in her car. Our firm has turned down an assignment after we contacted the property owner and he was very threatening on the phone. On another assignment, we were provided a police escort.

I remember back in my early days as an appraiser when I was on inspection of an old three-story mill building of questionable structural integrity. The owner of the mill was with me and we were on the third floor which had gaping openings. I could see straight down about 45 feet into the basement when the owner asked, "How much is it going to cost me to get a high value on this appraisal?" Although I wasn't directly threatened, this was one of the most uncomfortable moments of my career! I quickly backed away from the edge of the opening and left as quickly as I could.

During another inspection of an industrial warehouse we entered an area in which every other person was wearing a hazardous materials protection suit complete with gloves, goggles, and breathing apparatus. Our immediate thought was, "What do those people know that we don't know?" Apparently, asbestos abatement was taking place. I am also reminded of all those basements we have entered with obvious mold and possible radon gas. Are we at risk? Possibly.

Our office performs appraisals for eminent domain takings as well as foreclosures. These are circumstances where property owners tend to feel threatened and may react negatively toward the appraiser. During one meeting with a home owner where the Department of Transportation was going to take a narrow strip of the front yard, the home owner began sobbing uncontrollably about

how the state had no right to take her property. On another road widening project, a home owner angrily told me that the project had caused the breakup of his marriage.

I have also testified at town public hearings on the impact on property value of telecommunications towers and antennae. Hostile crowds at town meetings can be an uncomfortable situation.

As in any profession, threatening situations can and do exist. As I tell my staff, no assignment is worth risking our lives for. Use your judgment and listen to your inner voice. If you feel that danger is about, protect yourself.

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