

Appraising in a pandemic - by Maria Hopkins

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When I think of those on the front lines taking care of COVID patients and risking their lives every day, it makes the problems we face as appraisers almost inconsequential. Nevertheless, we are facing real issues attempting to do our jobs and keeping ourselves and others safe. Some loans qualify for an exterior inspection or a desktop assignment but many do not. It is up to the appraiser to decide for themselves if they want to do interior inspections. In my company, my staff appraisers have stopped going in homes during this surge period but I will take assignments with very strict safety protocol. There are some towns considered high risk that I avoid due to a high number of COVID cases. It is taking much longer to do appraisals because there is a lengthy interview process to decide if it's safe to go into their home. If anyone works in a hospital or is exposed to COVID patients, I try and get their appraisal converted to exterior only. It's too risky going in their home.

The safety protocol requires that the occupants of the house take a walk or ride once I get to the driveway or if that is not feasible for someone, they must stay seated in one room as I walk through the house. The door is left open for me to let myself in. There is no contact with the occupants. They

are asked to open all doors and turn on all lights as the goal is not to touch anything in their house. I wear a mask and gloves and remove my shoes at the door. My Lysol can is reserved for disinfecting my shoes. I have wipes in my car as well. I do not go in stores. Everything is delivered and washed. My office is in Central Mass where the numbers are not as high but it only takes one carrier. There are a high number of uneducated or just sadly misinformed people. I have people tell me "I'm not sick" and I quietly explain "you could be a carrier and unknowingly kill someone." There are many young people 20-40 years old in the hospital on ventilators and dying due to everyone thinking this only affects old people. Even if you don't get it, you can carry it to someone else. This is why I'm like a drill sergeant if I have to be with people who forget the rules for safety. I try and have no contact with people. It's funny when people want to get their dog away from me. I laugh and tell them your dog is fine. It's you I'm worried about. I'm 61 with a 4th grandchild on the way. I'm not taking any chances. 80% of people are cooperative and appreciative but I have problems with 20% of people who say they agree to my protocol but then don't wear a mask and want to be present. They either forget the rules or don't think it applies to them, only to everyone else in their house, but not them. I used to dodge these people a month ago but now I realize some people have mental issues or don't take this seriously. So I just enforce a no contact rule.

Multifamilies are especially difficult. The tenants must step out of the building while I go through their units. But then the landlord is sometimes more of a problem than the tenant. I often find that they haven't even explained to the tenant what the procedure will be when they give them notice and they want to follow me around with no mask. So you have to have a somewhat aggressive personality to deal with people when rules are broken. Enforcing safety protocol also takes more time. When I reach the property, I call the owner and have to give them time to get people together to leave the home or get to one room. Because inspections can take longer, I give a time window now for an appointment and call if I'm running late explaining why we can't estimate inspection times as easily now. Most people are understanding.

We also have the lowest interest rates in history with unprecedented volume. There is a temporary shortage of appraisers, especially ones that can handle the complex properties. I will handle the high end homes and difficult floor plans that other appraisers decline. I strongly believe that experienced appraisers that can handle them should, but of course we need to be paid for that superior skill. I am concerned that there seems to be a shortage of appraisers that can handle the difficult properties. There needs to be more field training. You can't learn that in a classroom. Lenders need to be sympathetic to what appraisers are struggling with to do their job during this time. Most appraisers are working harder than ever, working long hours. We know this volume won't last. Then we will face another set of issues as competent, experienced appraisers compete with less experienced appraisers and appraisal management companies who will try and cut fees to increase their profit margins. But for now I just want to do the job I love, support my family without risking their life doing it. To all, stay safe.

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