



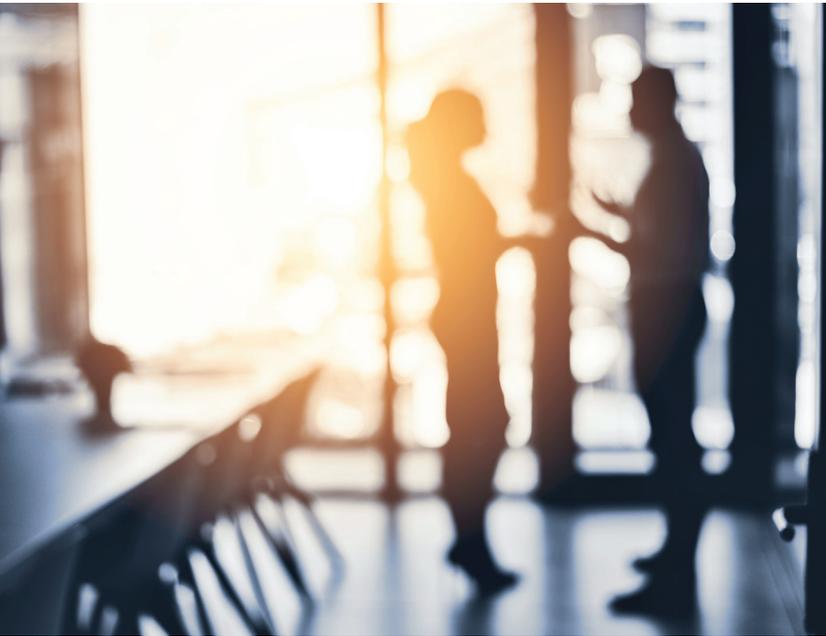
APPLYING SAFETY PRACTICES IN RELOCATION

The key is vigilance

BY DARRYL ROOT, R/W-RAC

The world we live in seems to be growing more dangerous. On a larger scale, there is an increasing number of protests and examples of civil unrest. However, unsafe conditions also exist on a smaller scale in the workplace and associated locations. The relocation profession is no different.

As relocation professionals, we need to be constantly and acutely aware of our surroundings. Observation is essential to what we do. Observing the individuals and businesses we relocate gives us insight into the needs of the displacees and what benefits may help them the most. We learn how the displaced business operates, and we learn any special needs that residential displacees may have.



However, one thing that we may forget to observe is the conditions that may bear on our physical safety. It is no secret that business and residential displacees may not be happy about being displaced. Many times, displacees are stressed, anxious and upset. They also may not be located in the safest areas.

Although it is not something we like to think about, there are instances where the issue of safety arises in relocation work. The relocation professional needs to be aware of their situation and employ certain safety practices.

The relocation agent should always advise his or her manager as to the displacement site he or she is visiting, the time of the trip and the expected time of return. This information will alert others if the agent does not return as scheduled, which could be an indication of a problem. Likewise, all relocation agents should carry cell phones, so that they are easily reachable and are able to call for help, if needed. Appointments should be made during daytime hours, if possible and convenient for the displacee. The relocation agent should be thoroughly familiar with the location of the displacement site and surrounding area. This will help the agent avoid potentially unsafe spaces while becoming knowledgeable of potential replacement sites.

When at the displacement site, the relocation professional should be conscious of his or her surroundings. The agent should be aware of the persons in the room and the location of exits from the building in case there is an emergency. Likewise, if the property is fenced or gated, the exits out of the parcel should be observed.

The agent should also be aware of any structural or environmental hazards on the property. Rotting flooring or ceiling structures should be noted and avoided. Likewise, a safe distance should be maintained from operating machinery or equipment.

Sometimes, it may even be more practical for the relocation agent to meet the displacee at a public place, at least for the initial meeting, providing each is comfortable doing so. Although displacement site visits are necessary at certain points during the course of the relocation, initial meetings at a neutral site may put the displacee at ease and provide a safe location for the initial interview.

The relocation agent should also be aware of any threats or threatening behavior the displacee may have displayed previously. In cases where the displacee has made disparaging remarks against the project or the displacing agency, it may be best to have two agents participate in the early meetings. Two agents can validate the conversations with the displacee, and another agent can provide an extra element of security. If the displacee has been openly hostile to the project in the past, obviously, it is best to avoid any controversial topics or subjects during the initial meetings. Furthermore, it is best to think of ways to diffuse any angry reactions. If the conversation becomes too heated, or if either agent feels uncomfortable or unsafe, stopping the conversation and politely asking to make another appointment may be the best option. The conversation could be continued later via virtual meeting platforms, etc. If a virtual meeting is scheduled, having a project manager at the meeting may help to make the conversation easier and is conducive to properly documenting what is said. The manager should be debriefed on everything that occurred during the initial meeting and why the agents felt uncomfortable and/or unsafe. The agents and their manager can then develop a specific safety strategy for the relocation case.

This article does not pretend to have all the answers for every situation in which an agent feels unsafe. This article touches on many safety topics, however, it is not intended to address every situation a relocation agent may encounter. In the final analysis, all relocation agents should follow their company's or agency's safety policies. Agents should familiarize themselves with these protocols and adhere to them to help assure their security. It is the personal responsibility of each agent to employ effective safety practices.

Unreasonable fears should not interfere with the relocation agent's job, but a healthy respect for personal safety is a necessary component for all successful relocations. 🌟



Darryl Root, R/W-RAC, is a senior right of way project manager for HDR. He has been in the right of way industry for 25 years.