

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Real Estate Board Launches Realty Watch in Central Okanagan

Kelowna, BC - The Okanagan Mainline Real Estate Board (OMREB) and the RCMP are pleased to announce the Central Okanagan launch of Realty Watch with 800 REALTORS® now available to assist police as extra 'eyes and ears' in their communities.

A community crime prevention and emergency assistance program operating in British Columbia since 1994, Realty Watch has expanded from the Fraser Valley Real Estate Board to the Chilliwack, Greater Vancouver, Victoria and Okanagan Mainline boards, and is now supported by 15,000 REALTORS® in the province.

The partnership between REALTORS® and police agencies, Realty Watch is also a partner agency of Amber Alert, and has two components:

1. REALTORS® observe and report to police a suspicious activity they may encounter during their day-to-day business.
2. REALTORS® respond to a police activated fan-out to search for missing or abducted children, vulnerable adults (e.g. has a physical or mental condition that puts them at high risk if not found soon), and seniors, or suspicious vehicles.

"Seeing the success of the Realty Watch network across the Lower Mainland, OMREB is thrilled to be announcing our pilot Realty Watch program in the Central Okanagan with the participation of members from Peachland to Lake Country," explains OMREB President George Cwiklewski. "We are pleased to be working with the RCMP on this worthwhile community endeavour."

OMREB's Realty Watch Chair Brenda Moshansky, herself a REALTOR® and the Past President of the Board, says one of the objectives of the cooperative effort between police and the real estate industry is to stop crime before it happens.

"Most property crimes are committed weekdays between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm, a time when REALTORS® are traveling through residential and commercial areas, conducting their regular business routine," she notes. "This puts them in a unique position to observe crimes about to happen or already in progress."

Noting that the RCMP continues to engage and partner with people and organizations in communities to make them even better places to live, Sgt. Ann Morrison of the Kelowna RCMP detachment is excited about the local launch of Realty Watch.

"The RCMP is grateful to the Okanagan Mainline Real Estate Board and its membership for partnering with and assisting law enforcement through Realty Watch," she says. "With 800 REALTOR® connected to this program in the Central Okanagan, 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 the province."

How a Fan-Out Will Work

To conduct fan-outs to its members, OMREB will utilize the Touchbase text messaging system which has a mobile application and provides numerous member-to-member communications and safety benefits, allowing individual REALTORS® to message other individual members, and the Board to message groups on a Board-wide or city by city basis.

In the pilot phase, the OMREB's Realty Watch program will focus on the Central Okanagan where there are 800 member REALTORS®. However, as the majority of OMREB's membership from Peachland to Revelstoke is already familiar with and using Touchbase on a daily basis, they will all be included in most fan-outs to provide optimum awareness up and down the Valley. When the program is in full swing, it will be rolled out Board-wide to include the North Okanagan and Shuswap Zones, and the RCMP detachments in those communities, for the full support and participation of OMREB's 1,100 member REALTORS®.

Any Realty Watch fan-out alert must be initiated by the RCMP and can only be sent by Board staff to OMREB members. Within minutes, REALTORS® will receive the text message on their cell phones or PDAs. If photos are pertinent and available, members will be directed to the Board's internal MLS® Home Page for a news pop-up linked to the RCMP media release.

In the case of abductions, the RCMP will contact OMREB to request a fan-out alert – usually for a missing person. Any REALTOR® who receives that fan-out, and sees or hears anything that could help police with the case is expected to call 250-762-3300 or 911 (whichever number is stipulated in the alert), identify themselves as a REALTOR® responding to an alert, and ask to share information with an officer in charge.

If the case is resolved, the police will again contact the Board to send out a cancellation of the alert to REALTORS® via the fan-out process. Missing persons fan-out cases are often solved within six to 24 hours of the fan-out alert, so it is typical to send out a cancellation shortly after the initial fan-out.

The Okanagan Mainline Real Estate Board is comprised of 1,111 member REALTORS® and 91 real estate offices in the Southern Interior of BC, and the Board area covers the Central Okanagan, North Okanagan and Shuswap – from Peachland to Revelstoke. The Central Zone of OMREB covers an area from Peachland to Lake Country and east along Highway 33 to Westbridge (including the Christian Valley).

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