Rekeying vs. Replacing Locks Between Tenants: What Landlords Need to Know

Every time a tenant moves out, a landlord faces a straightforward question: should the locks be rekeyed or replaced entirely? The answer affects security, cost, and the long-term condition of the property. For property managers handling multiple units, the choice also influences how efficiently they can manage access permissions across the building.

Both options have their place. Rekeying changes the internal mechanism so old keys no longer work, while keeping the same lock hardware. Replacing the lock means installing a new unit, often with updated features. Understanding when each approach suits the situation helps landlords make a practical decision that balances security with budget. Lock Change North York

How rekeying works

Rekeying involves removing the cylinder from the existing lock and installing a new pin configuration. A locksmith adjusts the internal pins so the old key no longer operates the lock, and a new key is cut to match the new pin setup. The rest of the lock hardware stays in place. The door handle, deadbolt, and strike plate remain unchanged.

This process is faster than a full replacement. It also keeps the same keying system if the landlord wants all units to use a master key. For buildings where multiple doors need updating at once, rekeying can be coordinated in a single visit. The locksmith brings a set of new cylinders keyed alike, and each door gets its own new key while the master key still works across all of them.

One practical advantage is that rekeying does not require matching new hardware to the existing door prep. If the current locks are in good condition and the landlord is satisfied with their security level, rekeying avoids the hassle of finding compatible replacements. It also prevents the need to patch screw holes or adjust the door for a different latch size.



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However, rekeying has limits. If the lock body itself is worn, corroded, or damaged, changing only the cylinder leaves a weak point. A worn latch can still be forced, and a loose handle can still compromise security. Rekeying also does not upgrade the lock to a higher security grade. If the existing lock is a basic model, the new cylinder may offer similar resistance to picking or bumping as the old one.

When replacement makes more sense

Replacing the entire lock gives the landlord a fresh start. New hardware brings modern security features such as anti-drill plates, hardened steel bolts, or smart lock capabilities. For a unit that has seen heavy use over several years, a new lock eliminates hidden wear that could lead to a failure later.

Replacement is also the better route if the landlord wants to change the lock type. Moving from a single-cylinder deadbolt to a double-cylinder model, or upgrading from a standard knob lock to a high-security mortise lock, requires new hardware. The same applies if the landlord decides to install a keyless entry system for the next tenant. A full replacement makes that transition possible.

Another scenario is when the lock has been compromised. If a key was lost or stolen during a previous tenancy, the landlord may not know how many copies exist. Rekeying addresses that by making the old keys useless. But if the lock itself was forced or tampered with, replacement is the safe choice. A lock that has been picked or pried may have internal damage that a new cylinder alone cannot fix.

Cost differences between rekeying and replacement vary depending on the lock type and the locksmith's rates. Rekeying generally costs less because it uses less material and less labour. Replacement involves the price of the new lock plus installation time. For a single door, the difference may be small, but for a building with many units, the savings from rekeying add up. Landlords should weigh that against the expected lifespan of the current hardware.

Key management and master key systems

For landlords who manage multiple units, a master key system simplifies access. A single master key opens all doors in the building, while each unit has its own change key that opens only that unit. Rekeying fits neatly into this setup. The locksmith can rekey each unit to a new change key while keeping the master key unchanged. The landlord does not need to carry a new set of master keys or update the building's key register.

Replacement can also work with a master key system, but it requires the new locks to be keyed to the same master. Not all lock brands or models support master keying, so the landlord must choose replacements that are compatible. This is worth checking before buying hardware. A locksmith can advise on which models accept master key cylinders and how to maintain a consistent system across the property.



When a master key is lost or stolen, the situation changes. Rekeying the entire building to a new master key system becomes necessary. In that case, replacement may be considered if the existing locks are old enough that rekeying is not cost-effective. Most of the time, though, rekeying all cylinders to a new master is the straightforward solution.

Tenant turnover and security

Between tenants, the security of the unit depends on controlling who has keys. Former tenants, their guests, or service providers may still hold copies. Rekeying or replacing the locks removes that risk. It is a standard practice that also reassures the incoming tenant that the property is secure.

Some landlords rekey every unit at every turnover as a matter of policy. Others rekey only when a key is unaccounted for or when the tenant requests it. The choice often comes down to the landlord's risk tolerance and the local rental market. In competitive markets, offering a freshly rekeyed unit can be a selling point. It shows attention to detail and respect for the tenant's safety.

For commercial properties, the same logic applies. When an employee leaves or a business changes tenants, the office door or unit entrance should be secured. Rekeying is usually sufficient unless the lock is damaged or the landlord wants to upgrade the security level. For business door locks that see frequent use, wear can accumulate faster than in a residential unit, so periodic inspection helps decide whether rekeying or replacement is due.

One practical tip is to keep a record of when each lock was last serviced. A simple log with the unit number, date, and type of work done helps track the age and condition of the hardware. When a turnover happens, a quick glance at the log tells the landlord whether the lock is due for replacement or still good for another rekey.

Choosing the right approach for each door

Not every door needs the same treatment. A front door that sees heavy daily use may wear out faster than a back door that is rarely opened. A unit entrance in a high-traffic building may benefit from a more durable lock, while a garden-level unit with a lower risk of break-in may be fine with a standard rekey. Landlords can assess each door individually and decide accordingly.

For business door locks in a commercial setting, the volume of use is higher. Employees, deliveries, and visitors pass through throughout the day. A lock that feels stiff or sticks when turning may be showing signs of internal wear. In that case, replacement might be the better investment. A new lock designed for commercial use will handle the daily cycles longer than a residential-grade lock.



Another factor is whether the door itself is in good shape. A sagging door or a misaligned strike plate can cause a lock to bind, leading to premature wear. Before committing to a rekey or replacement, checking the door alignment and the condition of the frame can save trouble later. A locksmith can make small adjustments that extend the life of the new or rekeyed lock.

Landlords in North York, Ontario, can rely on a local locksmith for both services. For those who need a quick turnaround between tenants, a professional rekey is often completed on the same visit. When replacement is the better route, the locksmith can recommend suitable hardware and install it correctly. For businesses and property managers looking for reliable service, **Lock Change North York** offers practical solutions for securing unit entrances and common area doors. It is worth contacting a locksmith early in the turnover process to avoid delays in getting the unit ready.

Ultimately, the decision comes down to the condition of the existing lock, the landlord's security goals, and the budget for that particular turnover. Rekeying is fast, cost-effective, and works well for locks in good shape. Replacement offers a fresh start with modern security and is the right call when the hardware is worn or compromised. By evaluating each door on its own merits, landlords can keep their properties secure without over-investing in hardware that does not need replacing. **Lock Change North York** can assist with both options, helping landlords make the right call for each unit.