



Troubleshoot Your Rental Property Maintenance Costs Away

Latchel eBook



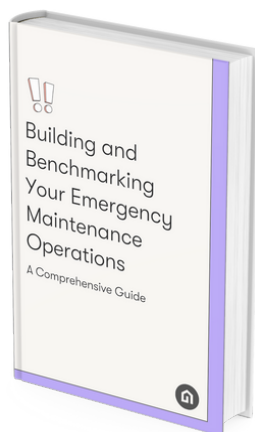
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The Importance of Sharp Problem Solving

Troubleshooting at its core is sharp problem solving. If you're reading this guide, you're likely an entrepreneurial individual that has innate problem solving abilities, so you're one step ahead. Though, all problem solving is not created equal, and every part of your operation comes with a different kind of tool box. Becoming (or hiring) a top notch sniper in the realm of troubleshooting maintenance repair requests can significantly keep maintenance costs down, and by effect increase overall net operating income. If you're a property manager, it also can make your clients very happy with their decision in hiring you and much more likely to stick with you long term.

On the flip side, ineffective troubleshooting in your maintenance operations can be one of the biggest risks to your business, especially when it comes to emergency maintenance requests. Identifying and solving emergency issues quickly can make you a hero to your clients, and inaccurately doing so can make you liable with long term damages that you were responsible for preventing. Point being - accurate and knowledgeable troubleshooting skills are essential to your business operations and its growth potential.



Related Guide:

Building & Benchmarking Your
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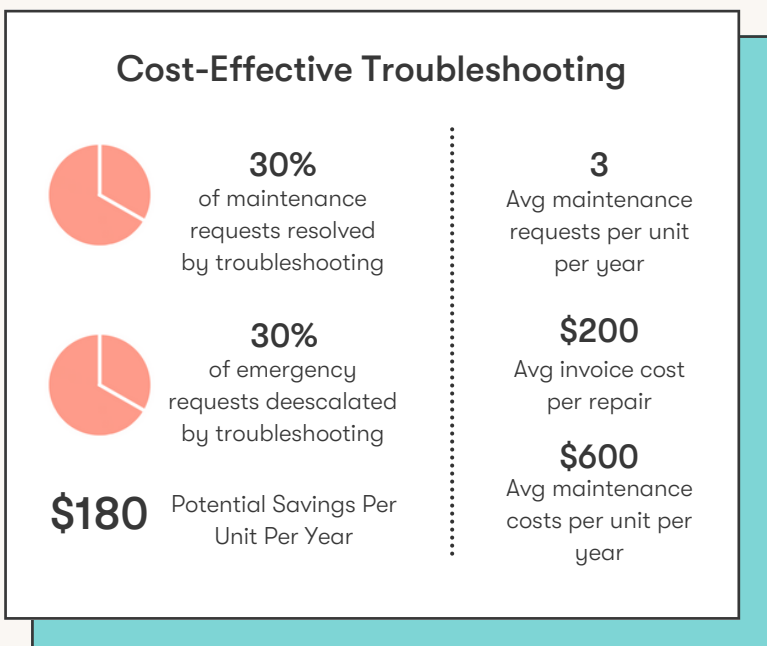
The Importance of Sharp Problem Solving

Many maintenance requests don't need to turn into work orders, and effective troubleshooting can save the sourcing and dispatching of a vendor and the costs of the repairs. At Latchel, 30% of the maintenance requests that come in are able to be resolved through troubleshooting over the phone without dispatching a vendor.

With an average invoice amount of \$200 per repair and an average of 3 maintenance requests per unit per year, you're spending an average of \$600 per unit per year. If 30% of those maintenance requests could be solved via troubleshooting then you could have a savings of \$180 (%30 of \$600) per unit per year.

So, if you manage 300 units, that's \$54,000 a year in potential savings. If you manage 500 units, that number goes to \$90,000.

When it comes to emergency maintenance 30% of our requests are able to be de-escalated to routine maintenance, avoiding the high costs of dispatching a vendor right away and/or after hours.



If you typically get more than 3 maintenance calls per year per unit, there is probably more you can be doing in the arena of preventative maintenance. To ensure you're spending as little time as possible on reactive maintenance, make sure you're checking all of the boxes of preventative maintenance. For an overview of preventative maintenance practices read:

[Preventative Maintenance: The Unsung Hero of Property Management](#)

The 6 Steps of the Troubleshooting Process

1. Identify the problem.

Ask as many questions as possible to find the core of the maintenance issue. Make sure the tenants are not in immediate danger, and if they are, direct them accordingly. Identify any other problems that could arise from the core problem of the request.

2. Isolate the cause of the problem.

Ask as many questions as possible relevant to the given issue being presented.

3. Correct the cause of the problem.

If the problem can be corrected via troubleshooting, walk the tenant through the steps to solve the problem (full guide below). If the problem needs dispatching, make sure that it is within your responsibility to repair rather than the tenants.

See our article on [tenant and landlord maintenance responsibilities](#)

4. Verify that the problem has been corrected.

If the request was able to be resolved via phone, have the tenant test the issue again, and ensure everything is working properly. If the request needs dispatching of a vendor, create the work order and confirm that repairs were successfully made after the work order is complete.

5. Document the Process.

Always document the entire troubleshooting process somewhere so there is a record of exactly what happened. At Latchel, we record every phone call for maintenance requests. You'll need a tangible record of what exactly was discussed in case of any issues down the road.

6. Follow up to prevent future problems.

Once the problem has been solved, follow up to ensure the fix is a sustainable one and no further issues are persisting.

Emergency vs. Non Emergency Maintenance

Knowing what qualifies as an emergency is essential to the business. Emergency repairs not treated as an emergency can lead to a costly pain later down the road, and at times expensive lawsuits. On the flip side, there are also many requests that come in as an emergency, but can be de-escalated to a standard maintenance request. When it comes to emergencies, it's important to keep everyone involved as protected as possible.

[Related Article: What Landlords Should Know About Requiring Tenants to Purchase Renters Insurance](#)

Below shows a basic chart of what qualifies as an emergency:

What Qualifies as an Emergency Issue?

- ✓ **Leaks that can cause property damage**
This includes roofing leaks, lawn/sprinkler leaks, toilet leaks and overflows, sink leaks, and HVAC leaks
- ✓ **No functioning toilets in the house**
- ✓ **Sewage backups or sewage on premises**
- ✓ **Water issues like:**
No water, dirty water, or no hot water
- ✓ **No heat in cold weather**
Under 45° F; 55° F if young children, elderly, or sick people are present
- ✓ **No AC in hot weather**
Over 95° F; 85° F if young children, elderly, or sick people are present
- ✓ **Security and safety issues**
Broken windows or broken/open doors
- ✓ **Cars blocked in by broken gates**
- ✓ **Electrical outages:**
(Not caused by the power company) and loss of power to medical equipment
- ✓ **Life threatening emergencies**
Gas leaks, carbon monoxide leaks, and fires are directed to 911

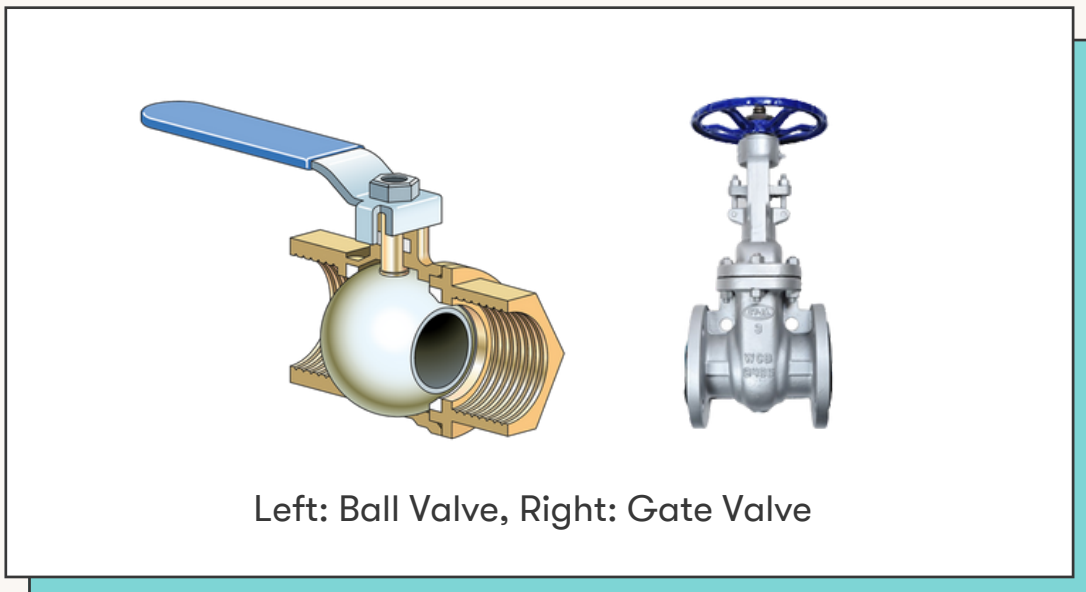
Troubleshooting Specific Issues

Leaks:

For any active leaks coming from plumbing, immediately shut off the water supply - usually located in the basement or outside of the establishment.

The main shutoff valve in your house probably has one of two designs:

- Gate valve: Gate valves are very reliable and last for years, but they become difficult to turn after not being turned for years. If you haven't closed the main shutoff valve since you moved into your house, do it now. Better to find out that you can't turn it with your bare hands now than to wait until you're standing in 6 inches of water.
- Ball valve: Houses with plastic or copper main water pipes leading into the house may have a full-flow ball valve. This valve is open when the handle is aligned with the pipe. To close it, turn the handle clockwise 1/4 turn so that it's at a right angle to the pipe.



Immediately soak up any standing water to prevent mold.

Troubleshooting Specific Issues

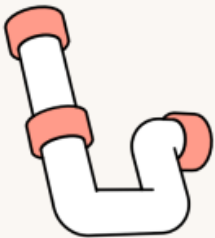
Roof Leaks:

- For roof leaks coming from an active storm, set up buckets (and other preventative measures where possible) to catch the leaking water until the storm passes and a contractor can be dispatched for repair.

*Contractors cannot be dispatched to repair during an active storm and the resident must call back in when the current storm ceases.

- It's typical to place a tarp over the roof when there is a day of no storm activity until the vendor can come out to repair the roof. Latchel will often dispatch a handyman to inspect, and possibly tarp a roof in the event that there is a break in the storm, but there is rain in the forecast within 3 days.
- Warping of ceilings is an indicator that there is a leak requiring attention. A non-emergency work order should be submitted.

Clogged Drains & Plumbing:



Typically, a drain can be snaked or cleared out with a drain cleaning product such as Drano .

This process should always be done using cleaning gloves.

To avoid dumping harmful chemicals into the drain, try first to clear the drain with a snake, similar to the one pictured here.

Troubleshooting Specific Issues

Clogged Sink:

For a clogged sink, you can detach the piping underneath the sink and pull out the portion that's clogged. There will be plenty of gunk to clean out from both the piping and the drain pulled up from out of the sink.



For a step-by-step on this process from WikiHow, [click here](#).

Clogged Toilets:

1. If the toilet bowl is full, put on gloves and use something to bail out the water into a bucket until bowl is only half full.
2. If the bowl is empty, add water to fill the bowl to halfway mark.
3. With plunger completely under water, fit the plunger completely over the bowl drain.
4. Press and pull the plunger rapidly up and down 15-20 times.
5. If water drains out of the bowl, add more water and repeat.
6. If water seems to be draining, try flushing the toilet.

If the toilet is not clogged but won't flush, open the lid of the back of the toilet to make sure the flusher is still connected to the water drainer in the toilet tank.

If the toilet is constantly running, it is likely also due to the chain disconnected.

Troubleshooting Specific Issues



Chain has likely become disconnected from flusher to valve

- Check chain
- Reattach if possible
- Use paperclip to reattach in interim
- If it cannot be reattached, the flusher valve will need to be replaced

The diagram shows a green and white toilet flusher assembly. A red circle highlights the chain mechanism, and a red arrow points to the right, indicating the chain's path. Below the main assembly, several small components like washers and nuts are shown.

Overflowing Toilets & Sinks:

Each sink or toilet should have one or two individual shut-offs at the wall to supply water. You can turn these off in the event of an overflow.

- Turn the valve (pictured below) clockwise until it stops turning.
- Each toilet and sink will have their own shut off valve.



Troubleshooting Specific Issues

Alarms:

Ensure all of the batteries are fully charged in smoke and gas detectors, and any other battery operated alarms. These should be regularly checked and changed annually.



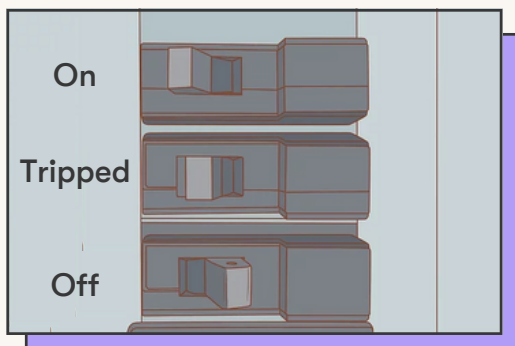
If an alarm is going off, and there is no smoke or smell of gas, change the batteries - most will not have to be taken off the ceiling to have the batteries changed.

If the alarm is still going off after the batteries have been changed, dispatch a contractor.

Electricity:

If experiencing a power outage, first check if other neighbors are experiencing a power outage. If so, call the electric company. If you are the only one experiencing a power outage, a circuit breaker may have been tripped and you can try resetting the breaker:

1. Find the main circuit breaker within the house or unit.
2. Ensure your hands are not wet or damp before touching any part of the circuit breaker.
3. Look for any switches that are fully or partially tripped:



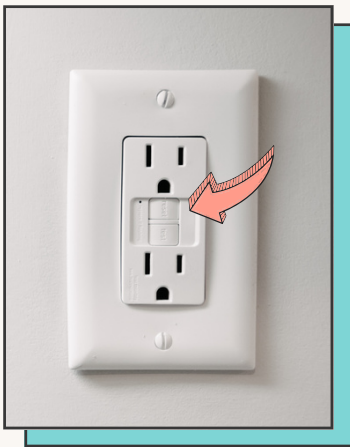
These are usually painted gray and located in the basement or in a utility closet.

Troubleshooting Specific Issues

4. Flip any off or tripped breakers to “on” and check the power again.
5. DO NOT handle the breaker system if it is hot. Instead, immediately call an electrician to help.
6. If there is only a partial outage within the house, check the bulbs to make sure they are not simply burnt out.

Outlets Not Working:

If it is one particular outlet that is not giving power, try hitting the “reset button” on the actual outlet, if it is a GFCI outlet. It’s the top button of the two pictured below:



If the outlet is not a GFCI outlet and does not have the reset buttons, check the main breaker box for any tripped breakers.

Appliances/HVAC:

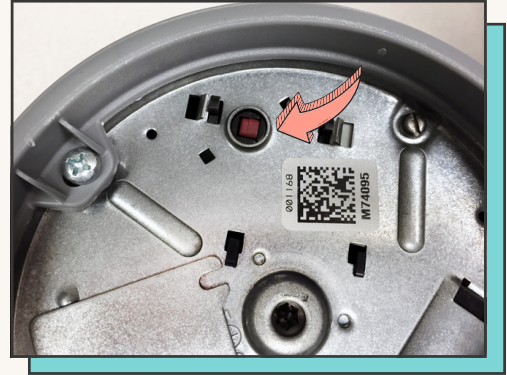
Many times home appliances are covered under home warranty. If break cannot be repaired via troubleshooting, check to make sure the appliance is not covered by home warranty before creating a general work order.

If the appliance is covered by warranty, the home warranty company will need to be the ones to do the repair. Before calling for repair, troubleshoot for the below:

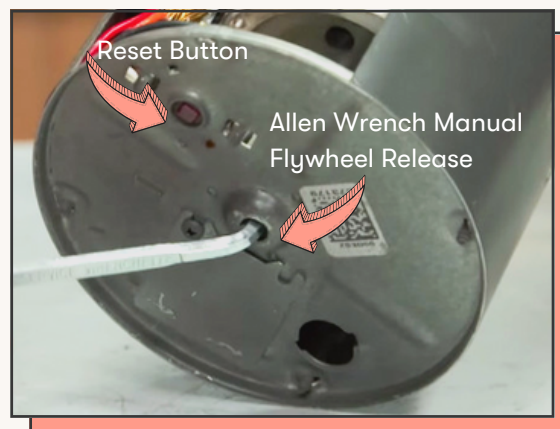
Troubleshooting Specific Issues

Garbage Disposals:

Garbage disposals often have an internal breaker that acts as a reset switch. This is represented with a red button on the bottom of the disposal. This can be pressed and the disposal may resume operation.



- Some disposals also have dual ON/OFF switches. There is typically one on the wall, and occasionally a secondary one under a countertop lip or inside the closest lower cabinet. Try turning both of these switches on and off.
- If the disposal is caked with sludge or has a smell, ice can be put into the disposal and run to clean it.
 - You should typically avoid putting coffee grinds in the garbage disposal as this can lead to the sludge that can break the disposal.
- If it is humming and appears jammed, there is often an allen wrench taped to the back of the disposal (or check around inside of lower cabinets) that can be placed into a space on the bottom of the disposal to manually unjam it.



Troubleshooting Specific Issues

Dishwasher:

1. If the dishwasher doesn't come on, check for local ON/OFF switches. There is often a circuit for a dishwasher. Also check the breaker system for the dishwasher.
2. If the dishwasher doesn't seem to clean well there is often lime and calcium that builds up inside, you can try running a cleaning product through a cycle to resolve this issue.

Water Heater:

1. If it is not heating, check the breaker to ensure it hasn't been tripped.
2. Also check the pilot light to ensure it hasn't gone out. If the pilot has gone out you can re-ignite it:
 - a. First turn off the switch to the gas before igniting the flame. This is usually a knob labeled "ON/OFF/PILOT"
 - b. Turn the knob to the PILOT position and push down to release the gas.
 - c. At the same time, push the ignite button and you should hear a whoosh sound.
 - d. Check that the flame is lit and turn the knob back to the ON position.
 - e. Some water heaters do not have an ignite button and need to be lit manually with a long lighter.
 - f. DO NOT leave the gas running for a long amount of time, you will put yourself at risk of a gas explosion.
 - g. If the pilot does not light within a few seconds, turn the gas off and try again.
3. If the water is not hot enough, you can adjust the temperature on the water heater, though water heaters should not typically exceed 140° F.



Troubleshooting Specific Issues

Refrigerator/Freezer is Not Cooling:

1. Check to make sure the refrigerator plug did not come loose and is still plugged in.
2. Reset the outlet.
3. Check the thermostat in the refrigerator to make sure it is set to the desired temperature.
 - a. If the thermostat is set to the desired temperature yet the fridge still does not feel cool, you'll have to dispatch for repair.
4. Listen for a buzzing - if you cannot hear a buzzing, the compressor/fans may not be working. This is not usually a DIY fix so you'll also have to dispatch for repair.
5. Feel the outer cabinet of the refrigerator, if it feels hot to the touch, this indicates that there is an airflow blockage. The vent is located at the very bottom of the fridge (think toe kick) this can be cleaned off to allow airflow.

Heating/Cooling:

Heating:

If the heater is run by a pilot light, make sure that the pilot flame did not go out. If it has gone out, you can reignite the flame.

- First turn off the switch to the gas before igniting the flame.
- Turn the switch to the gas lightly on, ignite the flame and turn up the gas from there until the flame is at a steady point.

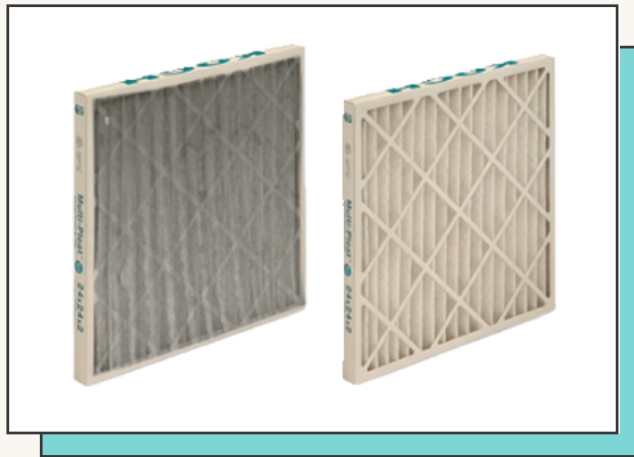
If the heater is run by an electronic thermostat, check the main breaker for the heater.

Troubleshooting Specific Issues

Cooling:

Check to make sure the air filters have been replaced recently. These should be replaced on a monthly basis. Dirty air filters can also contribute to poor air quality.

1. Turn off and unplug your air conditioner
2. Use a screwdriver to open the unit and remove the filter
3. If it is a washable filter, wash the filter with equal parts water and vinegar
4. If the filter is not washable and it is worn, you will have to buy a new filter and replace it. Below is a dirty vs. a clean air filter.



If the digital thermostat is not working, check the breaker.

About Latchel

At Latchel, we take over property maintenance coordination giving landlords and property managers the time to focus on what's important to them.

We do this through our core products:

1. Our after hours emergency service, which ensures you are never woken up in the middle of the night for a maintenance call again;
2. Our 24/7 emergency service, night or day, all day, every day, we've got you covered;

Of our over 1400 tenant reviews, we boast a 4.8 out of 5 stars for tenant satisfaction. Landlords who use Latchel love our product because they can sleep easy knowing we have their maintenance covered along with excellent guaranteed vendor pricing.

We improve the maintenance experience for everyone because at Latchel, we truly believe that you cannot get better by staying the same.

Interested in learning more about Latchel's services? We'd love to chat with you about how we can help you grow and scale your business.

Click the button below to schedule a call with a Latchel team member.

[Request Demo](#)