



Building & Benchmarking Your Emergency Maintenance Operation

Latchel eBook



What's in this Guide?

Why Emergency Response is Important	3
How to Create Your Plan	4
How to Measure Success	6
Specific Recommendations and Best Practices	7
About Latchel	16

Why Emergency Response is Important

Emergencies are the Largest Risk to Your Business

Face it: no other aspect of your property management business carries nearly as much risk as emergency maintenance. Solving emergency maintenance issues quickly and correctly can make the difference between being a hero and being a villain in the eyes of your clients. Perform well and you saved them thousands of dollars in unnecessary damages. Miss an emergency and you can become liable for damages you were responsible for preventing.

“ Opportunity and risk come in pairs.

Bangambiki Habyarimana

Confront Risks Head On

Only by facing risks head on can you hope to eliminate them. Better days are ahead if you know how to plan and prepare for them. This guide will help you plan for and improve your in-house emergency operation.



How to Create Your Plan

The Best Execution Starts with a Plan

Although plans never survive first contact with reality, creating a plan is the best way to organize your thinking and prepare for the unexpected. The size and scope of your plans should vary widely depending on the size and maturity of your organization.

“ Plans are worthless, but planning is essential.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Any good plan answers the following questions:

1. What is the vision?
2. What is the specific goal?
3. How will you measure success?
4. Who is responsible for what?
5. When will each element be executed?

Set the Vision: Be the Best; Never Miss an Emergency

Why set out to do something unless you want to be the best at it? Your vision should be simple: never miss an emergency.

How to Create Your Plan

Set the Goal: Rapid Response

While the vision is a great abstract rallying cry, your goal should be more specific. Great goals are SMART:



S pecific
M easurable
A chievable
R elevant
T imebound

For example, a SMART goal would be: “By the end of next month, we will have all emergencies diagnosed within 1 hour of receiving the initial tenant report.” Your SMART goal should be unique to your business.

What do you hope to achieve? What is your business’s SMART goal?



How to Measure Success

Set the Metrics: Measure Performance

If you're really serious about your goals you will measure them. With every initiative you implement it is essential to know how you will measure whether it is going according to plan or if you need to adjust.

Set the Action Plan: Defining Roles and Responsibilities

If you're a one-person team, this is easy: you do everything. But as soon as that team expands to two people it is critically important to clearly define who is responsible for what steps. Write out every outcome that needs to happen (e.g. buy and set up a virtual phone line) and who is responsible for them. Skipping this step will result in important steps not getting done.

Set Due Dates

After you have defined who is responsible for what, set a deadline for every single task. The best plans also clearly define the dependencies. What tasks must be complete before another one can begin? For example, you can't configure a new phone line until you have purchased one.



Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

Specific Recommendations

Now that the planning basics are out of the way, it is helpful to know what you might want to plan for. Here is an overview of what will be covered:

1. What needs to be in the process?
2. How to receive tenant requests?
3. Who should be on call?
4. What tools are available?
5. Where can I learn more?



The best businesses turn frustrating and complex processes into simple ones.

Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

What's in the Process?

The best in class emergency maintenance operations have the following stages:

1. Receive the tenant request.
2. Diagnose the tenant request.
3. Troubleshoot potential emergencies.
4. Dispatch the right person at the right time.
5. Provide visibility to the right people.
6. Confirm resolution.

Receiving Tenant Maintenance Requests

Knowing what to do is the easy part. The hard part is executing reliably. Every. Single. Time. Here are a few common ways to receive tenant requests, along with do's and don'ts.

Tenants have a habit of sticking to what they know, whether it is calling in maintenance requests, texting them in, or submitting through their online portal. Tenants are also infinitely creative. If you don't give tenants an easy way to submit emergencies, they will invent unpredictable methods. Your job is to make your emergency process predictable.

“ Knowing is not understanding. There is a great difference between knowing and understanding: you can know a lot about something and not really understand it.

Charles F. Kettering

Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

Phone Calls are Most Common

When you have an emergency, you want to talk to someone right away. Tenants expect to be able to call emergencies in. If you don't give them a phone line, they will submit their emergencies online or worse, not submit them at all.

The problem with most online submissions today is they do not have a mechanism to alert you or your team that something needs your attention right away. Even with email alerts, there is no way to separate the signal (true emergencies) from the noise (regular maintenance requests).

1. Give tenants a phone line to call into.
2. Passing an "on-call" phone does not guarantee a response.
3. Call centers cannot accurately diagnose or troubleshoot.
4. Texting in emergencies or submitting online is possible and will reduce costs, but comes with significant operational complexity.

Who Should be On Call?

Consider all of the parts of being on-call: receiving the tenant requests, diagnosing the situation, troubleshooting potential emergencies, dispatching the right people, notifying the right people, and confirming resolution.

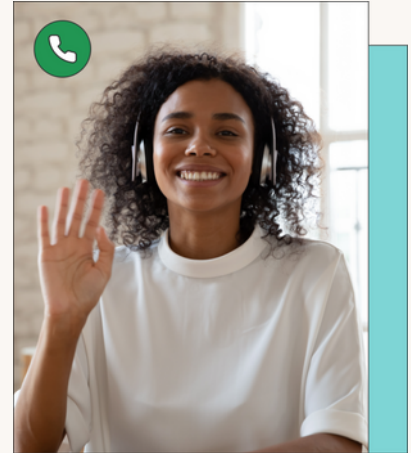
Not everyone on your team has the skills required to handle the full emergency lifecycle.

Expecting a receptionist with no maintenance experience to handle the full emergency process will result in over dispatching of preventable issues.

Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

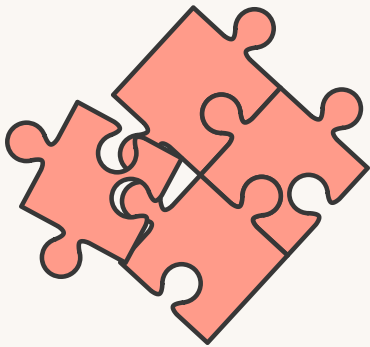
Best Practice: Screen Issues Before Involving Your Team.

Even if you're a one-person operation it is a waste of your time to take every request directly. Remember: the vast majority of late-night emergency call ins are not genuine emergencies. Waking yourself or your team up to deal with easy-to-solve issues will destroy your motivation and productivity.



How Can You Screen Issues?

The easy way to do this is to hire a reception team to do simple first-pass screening. This can be a call center, virtual assistants, or even team members with limited experience are a great front-line. Their only job is to screen out the basic issues and then escalate whenever there is a potential emergency.



Piece together different solutions that fit your business's needs.

What Tools are Available?

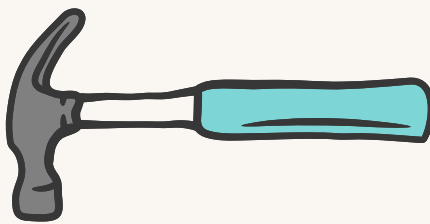
In the past 10 years, the industry has exploded with solutions to help solve 24/7 on-call problems. Keeping up with the latest trends and tools would be a full time job in itself.

The advantage you have is few of your competitors are investing in providing superior emergency response service. It is one of the few places in the industry where you have an opportunity to stand out from the rest.

Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

“ To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Mark Twain



Best Practice: Pick the Right Tool for the Right Job.

Managers and businesses that are in a rush look for a one-size-fits-all solution so they can implement it and move on. These solutions are designed for the manager's convenience, not for ensuring the best service.

By piecing together the right tools for the right jobs, you can ensure your process has strengths where your competitors have weaknesses.

Here you will learn about available tools for each of the following steps:

1. Creating phone lines and routing calls.
2. Alerting yourself and your team of emergencies.
3. Giving visibility and performing follow-ups.

Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

Creating Phone Lines and Routing Calls

Building a business phone line is super easy today. The hard part is choosing which service to go with. Here are the best options:

1. TalkRoute - The easiest and cheapest way to get a business line up and running. Includes a free trial and most of what you need is \$39/month. Ideal for remote teams or teams in the field.
2. RingCentral - A solid service ideal for deskphone or softphone users. Configuration can be difficult and pricing increases as your user base grows.
3. Twilio - Programmable voice. Many solutions today are built on top of Twilio. This requires programming experience or a programmer to configure to take advantage of their extremely low usage prices.

Best practice: Do not distribute your call center's phone number. Mask it behind a different number.

This allows you to easily switch service providers if you become unhappy with your service or you grow beyond what they can handle. Otherwise your call center owns the number and you need to go through the time-consuming and frustrating process of porting your number away from them. Pro tip: Use one of the services above and hide your call center phone number behind a different line.



Best practice: Know your call center or service provider's porting policy.

Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

Alerting yourself and your team of emergencies.

It is a smart decision to remove yourself and your team from the front-line of screening incoming requests. However, once you do this it is important that you find a method to alert your team whenever you need to get involved.

Best practice: Only one person should be alerted at a time.

Whoever you put in the front line for screening calls will eventually need to escalate to someone else for help. When this happens you cannot expect them to keep calling someone again and again until they pick up. Whatever they don't pick up after 10 calls or their phone is dead?

Instead you should rely on a service that will repeatedly call you and/or your team until someone picks up and responds. These solutions are from the IT world but solve property management problems, too.

1. OpsGenie - This is the best solution for getting started and also growing. It starts at \$0/month for up to 5 users with limited functionality. Depending on your emergency volume you can expect \$9 - \$19/month per user.
2. PagerDuty - This is an easy to use platform for simple configurations, with additional charges for specific on-call user schedules. Pricing starts at \$10 for 6 users but quickly jumps to \$39/month/user for more advanced features.

Both of the above work well for ensuring someone on your team wakes up to handle an emergency, with rollover to the next person if someone isn't answering. Other solutions exist but they are a bit more specialized to solve IT problems and do not translate as well to property management.

Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

Giving visibility and performing follow-ups.

When you have an emergency, how will you ensure the incident is a) tracked in your system of record, b) tenants are notified what the next steps are, c) the issue actually got solved, and d) owners and managers are properly informed?

Ultimately ensuring the right people get informed at the right time comes down to process discipline. Your existing property management platform, such as Appfolio or PropertyWare likely already has a tenant and owner communication function.

Guaranteeing that emergencies are entered into this system and tracked depends on your and your users. The important thing is to have a process that gives visibility to the right people.



The best businesses make sure problems are highly visible.

Specific Recommendations & Best Practices

Follow-up and visibility best practices:

1. Ensure information is tracked in your system.
2. Confirm appointment times with tenants.
3. Follow-up with tenants to ensure the issue is resolved.



What are my Next Steps?

Now you must decide what is best for you and your business. What do you outsource and what do you keep in-house? Be sure to track all of the components of the process: call receiving, diagnostic, troubleshooting, dispatching, and follow-up and ensure you have a plan in place for every step.

Want to talk to an expert in building emergency response processes? Connect with Latchel on [Facebook](#) or [schedule a meeting to chat with us over the phone](#).

Request Demo

About Latchel

Latchel is a PropTech startup company, backed by Y-Combinator and Bain Capital, that provides virtual concierge and maintenance coordination services to residential property management companies nationwide. We are unique in that we offer no-cost services that help property managers in 3 main ways:

- Increase Monthly Revenue Per Unit by up to \$40/month
- Reduce Resident Attrition by 40%
- Improve Online Reputation With More 5-Star Reviews

Customers who also sign up for our zero cost maintenance coordination services save 80% of the time they normally spend on maintenance, and reduce the operational costs of maintenance coordination.

Latchel is used in over 100,000 units nationwide by over 400 property management companies, and growing quickly. Latchel is built to help property management companies grow and scale. Below are just a few of the ways in which our customers benefit from our services:

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](#)