Should You Rekey or Replace Locks After Moving In?

Moving into a new home brings a to-do list that never seems to end. Among the boxes, paint swatches, and utility hookups, one task deserves priority: making sure your new home is secure. The question many homeowners face is whether to rekey the existing locks or replace them entirely. Both options improve security, but they serve different needs, budgets, and levels of convenience. Understanding the difference helps you choose the right path for your situation.

What Does Rekeying Involve?

Rekeying is the process of altering a lock so that a new key operates it while the old key no longer works. A locksmith disassembles the cylinder, rearranges the pins inside, and cuts a new key to match the new configuration. The lock hardware itself stays in place. This means the exterior appearance, the handle, and the strike plate remain unchanged.

Rekeying is a good option when the existing locks are in good condition and of a decent quality. If the deadbolt turns smoothly, the door frame is solid, and the cylinder is not worn out, rekeying gives you fresh key control without the expense or labor of installing new hardware. It is also a fast process. A skilled locksmith can rekey several locks in a single visit, and you walk away with one key that works all of them.

One major advantage is that rekeying keeps the original lock grade and brand. If the home already has a high-security lock, such as one with anti-snap features, you preserve that protection. You also avoid the potential of mismatched hardware or the need to drill new holes in the door or frame.

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When Replacing Makes More Sense

Replacing a lock means removing the entire assembly and installing a new one. This is the route to take when the existing hardware is damaged, outdated, or simply not secure enough for your needs. Older locks may lack modern features like anti-snap cylinders, hardened strike plates, or multipoint locking mechanisms. If the door frame is weak or the strike plate is attached with short screws, replacing the lock alone may not solve the problem.

Another reason to replace is when you want to upgrade the lock type. For example, moving from a basic key-in-knob lock to a deadbolt with a thumb turn, or from a single-cylinder lock to a multipoint lock that engages bolts at several points along the door edge. Replacing also

allows you to match all the locks in the home to the same brand or style, which can make future key management easier.



If the lock is physically worn, the key sticks, the latch drags, or the cylinder feels loose, replacement is the more reliable long-term fix. Worn parts can fail suddenly, leaving you locked out or unable to secure the door properly.

Cost and Time Considerations

Rekeying is generally less expensive than replacing, because you reuse the existing hardware and only pay for labor and new keys. The cost difference can be significant when you have multiple doors to secure. For a single door, the price gap may be modest, but for a whole house the savings add up.

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Time is another factor. Rekeying takes minutes per lock. Replacement involves removing old hardware, possibly modifying the door or frame, and installing the new lock. For a

straightforward swap, the time is similar, but if the new lock is a different size or style, the job can become a half-day project per door.

That said, replacement may be the more cost-effective choice in the long run if the existing locks are low-grade or failing. A good-quality lock can last for years, while repeated rekeying of a cheap lock does not improve its durability.

Security and key control

After moving into a home you do not know who might have copies of the keys. Previous owners, contractors, real estate agents, or neighbors could have duplicates. Both rekeying and replacing solve the key control problem by ensuring that only the new keys work. The difference is that rekeying leaves the old lock body in place, so if the lock itself has a security flaw, that flaw remains.

Modern locks offer features that enhance security beyond just key control. Anti-snap cylinders resist a common attack where a thief snaps the cylinder to turn the lock. Reinforced strike plates and longer screws strengthen the door frame against kick-ins. Multipoint locks distribute the locking force across the door, making it harder to force open. When you replace a lock, you can choose a model with these features. When you rekey, you keep whatever level of security the old lock already had.

For most homeowners, the decision comes down to the condition and quality of the existing hardware. If the locks are in good shape from a reputable brand, rekeying is a practical and affordable way to secure the home. If the locks are worn, basic, or from an unknown manufacturer, replacement is the better investment.



It is also worth checking the door frame and strike plate. A strong lock on a weak frame still leaves the door vulnerable. Reinforcing the strike plate and frame is often part of a lock replacement job, and it can make a substantial difference in overall security. Rekeying alone does not address these structural points.

Thinking about the whole system

Door lock installation is rarely just about the lock itself. The door, frame, hinges, and strike plate all work together. A heavy deadbolt is only as strong as the wood it anchors into. If the frame is split or the strike plate is fastened with half-inch screws, the lock can be defeated with a strong shoulder.

When evaluating your options, consider the entire entry system. If the door and frame are solid and the lock is of good quality, rekeying is a fine choice. If any part of the system is weak, upgrading that component, which often means replacing the lock and reinforcing the frame, gives you better protection.

For those looking for secure entry solutions for homes, the choice between rekeying and replacing depends on the existing hardware and your long-term plans. A rental property might call for rekeying to keep costs low, while a home you plan to live in for years might benefit from a full replacement with modern security features.

Another angle to consider is convenience. If you want all doors to operate with the same key, rekeying is the simplest way to achieve that without buying multiple locks from the same brand. A locksmith can rekey all the cylinders to match a single key. Replacement locks can also be keyed alike, but that requires purchasing them as a set or having them rekeyed after installation.

In some cases, a mix of both approaches works best. You might replace the front door lock with a high-security deadbolt and rekey the back and side doors to match the same key. This gives you the best security at the main entry while keeping costs under control elsewhere.



For homeowners who want secure entry solutions for homes, understanding the trade-offs helps you make a choice that fits your situation. Rekeying is fast, affordable, and effective when the hardware is sound. Replacing gives you a fresh start with modern features and addresses weaknesses in the door system. Neither is universally better; the right choice depends on your priorities, your budget, and the condition of your current locks.

Whether you decide to rekey or replace, the important thing is to take action soon after moving in. Delaying leaves the home open to anyone with an old key. A professional locksmith can assess your existing hardware and recommend the best approach for your specific doors and frames.

Okey Locksmith, located at 3121 SW 29th St, Oklahoma City, OK 73119, USA, offers 24/7 mobile automotive, residential, commercial, access control, and emergency locksmith services in Oklahoma City and nearby communities. You can reach them at +1 405-703-8943 for assistance with rekeying or replacement.