LOCKBOX INSIGHTS

SoCal Home Maintenance Checklist

The repairs that cost $200 in March cost $4,000 in August. Here's what to do and when.

Why Most Home Emergencies Aren't Emergencies

In Southern California, most home emergencies aren't emergencies. They're maintenance items that were deferred long enough to become expensive.

The water heater that failed on a Sunday morning was making noise for two years. The roof that leaked after the first November rain had granule loss visible since spring. The HVAC that failed in a July heat wave hadn't been serviced in four years.

Emergency repairs cost more than maintenance. They compound — a small leak becomes mold becomes drywall becomes subfloor. And they're almost always avoidable.

This checklist is organized by season and by the specific risks SoCal homes actually face.

Monthly

These tasks take under 15 minutes and prevent the calls that take days to fix.

Test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors

Press the test button. Replace batteries if the response is slow or absent. CO is odorless and causes harm before symptoms appear. This is not optional.

Check HVAC filter condition

Replace if visibly grey or clogged. In SoCal's dusty climate, 1" filters often need monthly changes. A clogged filter strains the blower motor and raises your electric bill.

Run water in rarely used fixtures

Prevents drain traps from drying out and allowing sewer gas into living spaces. Guest bathrooms, utility sinks, floor drains.

Inspect under sinks for leaks

Check supply lines, drain connections, and cabinet floors for moisture. Most slow leaks run for months before they're visible on the surface.

Test GFCI outlets

Press Test, confirm power cuts, press Reset. Bathrooms, kitchen, garage, exterior. GFCI protection fails silently — testing is the only way to know it's working.

Quarterly

- Replace HVAC filter — even if the monthly check looked acceptable. Quarterly is the minimum.
- Clean dryer vent lint trap and check exhaust duct — clogged dryer vents are a leading cause of residential fires.
- Pour water down floor drains and laundry drain — maintains trap seals, especially in garages and utility rooms.
- Check water heater for corrosion, leaks, or rumbling sounds — sediment buildup reduces efficiency and lifespan.
- Inspect caulk around tubs, showers, and sinks — cracked caulk is the most common entry point for hidden moisture damage.
- Test pressure-relief valve on water heater — lift lever briefly; water should discharge and stop cleanly.
- Check garage door auto-reverse function — place a 2x4 flat on the ground; door must reverse on contact. Federal law.

Spring (March – May)

Post-winter inspection season. This is when you find what the rains revealed.

- Inspect roof after winter rains — look for missing or lifted shingles, damaged flashings, and granule loss in gutters. Catch it in March, not November.
- Clean gutters and flush downspouts — blocked gutters force water under fascia and into the eave.
- Check window and door weatherstripping — replace if compressed, torn, or no longer sealing.
- Re-caulk exterior gaps at windows, doors, and penetrations.
- Service air conditioning before summer heat — schedule HVAC tune-up before demand spikes. A coil cleaning in April costs far less than an emergency call in July.
- Inspect attic for signs of moisture or pest activity — post-rain inspection catches leaks before they reach ceiling drywall.
- Test all exterior GFCI outlets — moisture and temperature cycling can trip or damage exterior devices.
- Flush water heater to remove sediment — connect hose to drain valve; run until water clears.
- Inspect sprinkler heads and drip system — first run of the season often reveals winter damage.

Pre-Fire Season (April – June) — California Priority

This is not standard maintenance. In Southern California, it's property protection — and increasingly, insurance compliance.

California law (PRC §4291) requires 100 feet of defensible space around your structure. Insurance providers in Inland Empire ZIP codes are now inspecting for compliance before renewal.

Zone 1: 0–30 feet from structure

- Remove dead plants, dry leaves, and debris entirely from this zone.
- No combustible material directly against the structure — wood mulch against the foundation is a direct ember pathway.

Zone 2: 30–100 feet from structure

- Thin vegetation — grass mowed to 4" maximum; tree canopies at least 10 feet apart.
- Remove dead tree branches within 10 feet of chimney or roof.

Additional pre-fire tasks

- Clean roof and gutters of leaves and pine needles — dry debris ignites from ember cast. This is how homes in otherwise-defended neighborhoods are lost.
- Inspect and clean chimney and fireplace flue — creosote buildup plus dry conditions is a documented fire risk.
- Confirm address numbers are visible from the street — minimum 4" tall, contrasting color. Emergency responders cannot help a home they can't find.
- Move woodpiles at least 30 feet from the structure — stacked wood near the home is a direct flame pathway.

Fall (September – November)

Prepare for heating season and winter rains. Inland SoCal sees its first significant rain between October and December — often the first real weather test of the year.

- Service heating system before first use — annual furnace inspection catches cracked heat exchangers before they become a CO hazard. Have it checked before you run heat.
- Replace smoke and CO detector batteries — use Daylight Saving Time end as your annual reminder.
- Clean gutters after leaf drop — second clean of the year.
- Test thermostat heating mode — run a heat cycle before you need it. Delayed ignition is better discovered in September than December.
- Check attic insulation coverage — fall is ideal for adding insulation before winter energy bills climb.
- Seal gaps in foundation and exterior walls — rodents move indoors in fall. Gaps larger than 1/4" are entry points.
- Inspect weatherstripping on all exterior doors.

Annual

- Professional HVAC inspection and service — clean coils, check refrigerant, test safety controls.
- Chimney sweep and inspection (if used) — NFPA 211 recommends annual inspection for any used fireplace or wood stove.
- Pest inspection — in SoCal, subterranean termite activity is year-round. Termite damage found early costs hundreds. Found late, it costs tens of thousands.
- Test main water shut-off valve operation — valves seize when unused. Exercise it fully and confirm it closes completely.
- Inspect electrical panel for signs of overheating — discoloration, burning smell, or warm breakers require immediate evaluation.
- Check all exterior wood for rot and paint failure — window sills, fascia, and trim are most vulnerable.
- Re-grade soil if settled away from foundation — soil should slope away from structure at 6" over 10 feet.

• Review and update home inventory for insurance — photograph improvements and valuables annually. Claims without documentation recover less.

Ready to take the next step?

A checklist is most useful when someone has already looked at your specific home and told you what actually needs attention — not what a list says generically, but what your home needs right now. A Lockbox Insights maintenance inspection covers all major systems and delivers a prioritized report you can use to plan repairs before they become emergencies.

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