

The Rental Property Maintenance Playbook

Systems, Documentation & Cost Control for Illinois Landlords and Property Investors

Complete operating system for rental property maintenance: tenant turnover procedures, wear-vs-damage documentation, vendor management, capital expense planning, security deposit defense, maintenance reserves, and Illinois landlord compliance.

80+ Page Professional Guide	\$39.99	Revised & Expanded Edition — 2026
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Michael Blucker — Goal Investment, Inc. | 132 W Woodstock St Unit A, Crystal Lake, IL 60014 | (815) 669-0846

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ILLINOIS-SPECIFIC NOTE: Illinois statutes referenced in this guide include the Illinois Residential Landlord and Tenant Act (765 ILCS 720), Illinois Property Maintenance Code, and various municipal codes. Laws change — verify current statutes at ilga.gov before relying on any legal reference.

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A landlord and investment property owner field guide for turnovers, documentation,

preventative maintenance, vendor control, reserves, and capital planning.

Michael - GOAL Investment Inc.

Built for Illinois landlords who want fewer emergencies, cleaner turnovers, better records, and more predictable

property costs. Educational material only; verify legal requirements with an Illinois attorney and your local

Plain-English systems for tenant turnover, wear-vs-damage, maintenance scheduling, vendor management,

security deposit documentation, and reserves.

Move-in / move-out inspection

Room-by-room documentation sections with photo prompts and signature lines.

A repeatable way to rate response time, pricing, workmanship, communication, cleanup, and compliance habits.

Capital expense projection

Included as a downloadable workbook for planning major repairs across multiple properties.

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How to Use This Playbook

Use this guide as a repeatable operating system, not a one-time checklist. The best landlords reduce risk by inspecting on a

schedule, documenting condition before conflict exists, and keeping maintenance reserves separate from spending money.

For Illinois properties, landlord-tenant duties can come from state statutes, local ordinances, the lease, building codes, and

habitability expectations. Local rules may be stricter than statewide rules, especially in Chicago and Cook County.

The forms in this guide are templates. Do not treat them as legal advice. When money will be withheld from a deposit, when

an eviction or notice is involved, or when the unit is in Chicago, Cook County, or another ordinance-heavy area, verify the

exact rule before acting.

If it was not documented before the dispute, assume you may have to prove it the hard way.

Preserves evidence and condition

Take wide + close-up photos with date

Supports cost and scope

Require itemized labor/materials

Reduces access disputes

Use written notice according to lease/local law

Document completion and tenant response

Illinois Legal Framework in Plain English

Illinois rental compliance is not one single law. A landlord may need to follow state landlord-tenant statutes, the Security

Deposit Return Act, local ordinances such as Chicago RLTO or Cook County RTLO, fair housing laws, municipal property

maintenance codes, and the written lease.

The landlord must separate business judgment from legal entitlement. A repair can be real, needed, and expensive, but that

does not automatically mean it is deductible from a tenant deposit. Deposit deductions generally require tenant-caused

damage beyond ordinary wear, supported by documentation.

Good records are your defense. Move-in photos, move-out photos, dated repair invoices, tenant communications, inspection

notes, and vendor receipts turn an argument into evidence.

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Wear vs. Damage: The Decision System

Wear is expected decline from ordinary use over time. Damage is deterioration caused by abuse, negligence, misuse,

accidents, unauthorized alterations, pets, smoke, water neglect, or actions beyond normal living. The gray zone must be

documented and depreciated fairly.

Ask three questions before charging a tenant: Was the item documented as clean and functional at move-in? Is the condition

beyond normal aging? Can I prove the repair cost, timing, and cause? If the answer is no, do not treat the deduction as

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The safest landlord habit is to build a photo record during every turnover. Use consistent angles and include closeups with a

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Move-In Inspection System

A strong move-in inspection prevents future disputes. Walk the unit slowly, record the condition of every room, and let the

tenant identify pre-existing defects in writing before they take full possession.

Do not rush the form. Small items like missing screens, weak caulk, loose towel bars, scratched floors, stained carpet, old

mini-blinds, slow drains, and chipped counters become deposit disputes later if they are not recorded now.

Use the form in this guide with photos. Save copies digitally by property, unit, tenant name, and move-in date.

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Turnover Inspection and Make-Ready Workflow

Turnover is where profit leaks out. Every missed item delays rent-ready status, every undocumented repair weakens

deductions, and every rushed vendor call costs more than planned work.

Separate the turnover into four lanes: safety/code, habitability/function, cleanliness/presentation, and upgrade opportunities.

Safety and habitability come first. Cosmetic upgrades come after the unit is dry, secure, and functioning.

A tight turnover packet includes move-out condition, photo log, repair scope, vendor assignments, cost estimate, completion

date, re-inspection, and marketing-ready confirmation.

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Security Deposit Documentation

A security deposit is not a renovation fund. It is a tenant-held risk deposit subject to state and local rules. Deductions should

be specific, supported, and connected to actual conditions.

Best practice: keep the move-in report, move-out report, dated photos, invoice or paid receipt, tenant communications, and

itemized deduction explanation together in one PDF packet.

Where local ordinances apply, deadlines, receipts, interest, and deposit handling rules may be more demanding than

general statewide expectations. Verify before withholding.

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Preventative Maintenance Schedule

Preventative maintenance reduces vacancy because the property stays rent-ready. Waiting until a tenant reports failure

usually costs more than scheduled inspections.

Every property should have monthly, seasonal, semiannual, and annual tasks. Midwest properties need winterization, gutter

control, sump pump testing, exterior drainage checks, furnace prep, AC prep, and freeze-risk inspections.

The schedule should be realistic. A plan that fits inside 60 to 90 minutes per inspection is more likely to be completed.

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Reducing Vacancy Through Maintenance

Vacancy is rarely caused by one big problem. It is usually the result of accumulated friction: sticky doors, slow drains, weak

HVAC, poor lighting, pest gaps, bad caulk, worn flooring, and slow response times.

A well-maintained rental photographs better, rents faster, and attracts tenants who expect a professional process. The goal

is not luxury; the goal is clean, safe, functional, documented, and predictable.

Focus repairs on items tenants notice immediately: locks, lights, water pressure, temperature control, odor, cleanliness,

appliance function, and visible leaks.

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Vendor Management Across Multiple Properties

A landlord with multiple properties needs a vendor bench, not just one favorite contractor. Build categories: plumbing,

HVAC, electrical, handyman, roofing, drain cleaning, appliance repair, pest control, flooring, cleaning, and emergency

Rate vendors by response time, price clarity, quality, documentation, cleanup, tenant communication, and whether callbacks

happen. A cheap vendor who creates callbacks is not cheap.

Use written scope, photo references, authorization limits, invoice requirements, and completion photos for every job.

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Building a Sub-\$200 Monthly Reserve

A reserve fund is not optional if you want rental property to stay profitable. The target is to smooth out repairs so one water

heater or sewer backup does not wipe out several months of cash flow.

A sub-\$200/month/unit reserve can work for smaller or newer units, but older units, high-turnover units, buildings with

boilers, flat roofs, older plumbing, or heavy tenant use may require more.

Start with four buckets: routine maintenance, turnover repairs, emergency repairs, and capital replacement. Money in the

reserve should be treated as property operating money, not owner spending money.

If it was not documented before the dispute, assume you may have to prove it the hard way.

Preserves evidence and condition

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Capital Expense Planning

Capital expenses are large replacements or improvements that are predictable over time: roof, HVAC, water heater, exterior

paint, flooring, appliances, windows, driveway, decks, plumbing lines, electrical panels, and major drainage corrections.

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The downloadable spreadsheet included with this playbook lets you list each property, expected replacement year,

estimated cost, reserve balance, and monthly funding need.

Update the projection at least twice a year and after every major inspection.

If it was not documented before the dispute, assume you may have to prove it the hard way.

Preserves evidence and condition

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Supports cost and scope

Require itemized labor/materials

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Document completion and tenant response

Owner Inspection Form Instructions

Inspection forms must be simple enough to use and detailed enough to defend. Use PASS, WATCH, ACTION, and

URGENT ratings. Keep notes factual and avoid blaming language.

Take photos before touching anything. For tenant-occupied inspections, respect notice rules, privacy, and lease provisions.

When in doubt, give written notice and document the purpose.

The forms in this guide are written for owner maintenance use, not official code certification.

If it was not documented before the dispute, assume you may have to prove it the hard way.

Preserves evidence and condition

Take wide + close-up photos with date

Supports cost and scope

Require itemized labor/materials

Reduces access disputes

Use written notice according to lease/local law

Document completion and tenant response

Emergency and Habitability Response

Emergency maintenance requires triage. Stop the damage, protect life safety, document the condition, notify the proper

party, and assign the right professional.

Gas smell, active electrical hazard, sewage backup, no heat in dangerous cold, major water intrusion, structural movement,

and carbon monoxide alarms are not routine work orders.

Have tenants report emergencies by phone and in writing. Have a written emergency script so the tenant knows where

shutoffs are and what not to touch.

If it was not documented before the dispute, assume you may have to prove it the hard way.

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Take wide + close-up photos with date

Supports cost and scope

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Tenant Communication Templates

Good communication reduces conflict. Keep messages short, factual, time-stamped, and tied to the lease or maintenance

Avoid promising what you cannot control. Say “vendor has been contacted” rather than “this will be fixed today” unless the

schedule is confirmed.

Use written follow-up after phone calls. A simple repair log protects both parties.

If it was not documented before the dispute, assume you may have to prove it the hard way.

Preserves evidence and condition

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Supports cost and scope

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Document completion and tenant response

Vendor Scorecard and Payment Controls

Do not manage vendors by memory. Use a scorecard after each job, then review the pattern quarterly.

A vendor with three

callbacks, late arrivals, or poor photos should be moved down the list.

Payment controls should include written authorization, not-to-exceed amount, before photos, after photos, itemized invoice,

materials receipts when needed, and lien waiver for larger jobs.

For bigger jobs, use progress payments tied to verified milestones, not dates alone.

If it was not documented before the dispute, assume you may have to prove it the hard way.

Preserves evidence and condition

Take wide + close-up photos with date

Supports cost and scope

Require itemized labor/materials

Reduces access disputes

Use written notice according to lease/local law

Document completion and tenant response

Forms and Templates Library

This final section gives you repeatable forms: move-in inspection, move-out inspection, tenant maintenance request, vendor

scope sheet, vendor scorecard, maintenance reserve worksheet, capital expense intake, turnover punch list, and

emergency contact sheet.

Print them for a binder or use them digitally. The best system is the one you actually use on every unit, every time.

Attach photos, receipts, and messages to each form packet before filing it.

If it was not documented before the dispute, assume you may have to prove it the hard way.

Preserves evidence and condition

Take wide + close-up photos with date

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Supports cost and scope

Require itemized labor/materials

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Wear vs. Damage Matrix

Use this page as a decision aid. It does not replace legal advice, lease language, or local ordinance review, but it gives

landlords a practical framework for making consistent decisions.

Large holes, gouges, unauthorized

Move-in/out photos, paint age

Traffic wear over time

Pet urine, burns, large stains

Photos, cleaning invoice, age

Broken hardware from force

Foreign objects, grease abuse

Plumber notes, tenant history

Seal failure/age possible

Photo, vendor diagnosis

Misuse, missing pieces, broken racks

Model age, photos, invoice

When the question is close, do not guess. Get a vendor note, compare move-in and move-out photos, apply

reasonable depreciation, and verify local deposit rules.

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Maintenance Frequency Map

Use this page as a decision aid. It does not replace legal advice, lease language, or local ordinance review, but it gives

landlords a practical framework for making consistent decisions.

Heat reliability and air quality

Water intrusion prevention

Mold and water protection

After storms/Spring/Fall

When the question is close, do not guess. Get a vendor note, compare move-in and move-out photos, apply

reasonable depreciation, and verify local deposit rules.

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Reserve Budget Example

Use this page as a decision aid. It does not replace legal advice, lease language, or local ordinance review, but it gives

landlords a practical framework for making consistent decisions.

Balanced routine + turnover

Average single-family or small rental

Older property or high-use unit

Older systems, flat roof, boilers,

When the question is close, do not guess. Get a vendor note, compare move-in and move-out photos, apply

reasonable depreciation, and verify local deposit rules.

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Use this page as a decision aid. It does not replace legal advice, lease language, or local ordinance review, but it gives

landlords a practical framework for making consistent decisions.

Clear scope and itemization

When the question is close, do not guess. Get a vendor note, compare move-in and move-out photos, apply

reasonable depreciation, and verify local deposit rules.

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Move-In Inspection Form

Print this page, duplicate it for each unit, or recreate the fields in your property-management software. Keep the wording

factual and attach photos or invoices when available.

Existing Damage Notes:

Owner/Agent Signature:

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Move-Out Inspection Form

Print this page, duplicate it for each unit, or recreate the fields in your property-management software.
Keep the wording

factual and attach photos or invoices when available.

Recommended Deposit Action:

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Tenant Maintenance Request Form

Print this page, duplicate it for each unit, or recreate the fields in your property-management software.
Keep the wording

factual and attach photos or invoices when available.

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Vendor Work Order Scope Sheet

Print this page, duplicate it for each unit, or recreate the fields in your property-management software.

Keep the wording

factual and attach photos or invoices when available.

Not-To-Exceed Amount:

Before Photos Required:

After Photos Required:

Vendor Scorecard Template

Print this page, duplicate it for each unit, or recreate the fields in your property-management software.
Keep the wording

factual and attach photos or invoices when available.

Print this page, duplicate it for each unit, or recreate the fields in your property-management software.
Keep the wording

factual and attach photos or invoices when available.

Emergency Contact and Shutoff Sheet

Print this page, duplicate it for each unit, or recreate the fields in your property-management software.

Keep the wording

factual and attach photos or invoices when available.

Gas Shutoff Location:

Electrical Panel Location:

Preferred Electrician:

Insurance Claim Phone:

Capital Expense Intake Sheet

Print this page, duplicate it for each unit, or recreate the fields in your property-management software.

Keep the wording

factual and attach photos or invoices when available.

Estimated Replacement Year:

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Illinois and Local Source Notes

Use these source anchors to verify the legal topics discussed in this educational guide. Local ordinances and lease terms

can change, so verify rules before withholding money, issuing notices, or making legal decisions.

Illinois tenant rights

Illinois Attorney General landlord/tenant rights PDF

General plain-English overview of tenant/landlord duties.

Illinois Security Deposit Return Act and Security

Deposit return, deductions, and possible interest rules.

Cook County Residential Tenant Landlord

Deposit cap, return deadlines, repair and notice rules for covered

Chicago Municipal Code Chapter 5-12

Detailed security-deposit, notice, and tenant-right rules in

Municipal property maintenance/building

Habitability, inspection, permits, rental registration, and local

This guide is educational and operational. It is not legal advice, does not create an attorney-client relationship, and

should not be used as a substitute for an Illinois attorney, local housing authority, or municipal inspector.

Blank Owner Notes / Property Log

Use this page for unit-specific notes, vendor contacts, tenant requests, reserve updates, or turnover planning.

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Professional Addendum

Enhanced Reference Material — 2026 Edition

The Security Deposit Documentation System That Wins Disputes

Illinois landlord-tenant disputes about security deposit deductions are almost always decided by documentation quality, not by who is right. The documentation system that wins: Pre-move-in: Walk the unit with the tenant. Use a room-by-room checklist with pass/fail ratings for every surface, fixture, and appliance. Take 50–100 timestamped photographs including floors, walls, ceiling, all fixtures, appliances inside and out, and all pre-existing damage. Both parties sign the completed checklist. Store digitally with cloud backup. Mid-tenancy: Document any tenant-reported repair requests in writing (text, email, or written notice). Document your response and completion. Post-move-out: Repeat the identical inspection process within 3 business days of move-out. Use the same checklist, same photo positions. Compare side-by-side. Normal wear and tear (not deductible): carpet wear in traffic areas, small nail holes from pictures, minor wall scuffs, faded paint. Damage (deductible): carpet stains or burns, large holes in walls, broken fixtures, unapproved alterations, pet damage. The written itemized deduction statement must be mailed or delivered within 30 days (or 45 days with receipts/estimates) to comply with 765 ILCS 710.

Capital Expense Reserve Planning

The Capital Expense Reserve — a dedicated savings account for major replacements — is the single practice that separates professional property managers from reactive landlords. Reserve targets by component (Northern Illinois 2026 costs): Roof (asphalt shingle, 2,000 sq ft): \$10,000–18,000 replacement cost, 20-year lifespan → reserve \$500–900/year. HVAC (furnace + AC): \$7,000–14,000 replacement, 15-year lifespan → reserve \$470–935/year. Water heater (50-gal gas): \$1,000–1,600, 12-year lifespan → reserve \$83–133/year. Kitchen appliances (full set): \$3,000–6,000, 10–15 year lifespan → reserve \$200–600/year. Exterior paint/siding maintenance: \$3,000–8,000 per cycle, 7–10 years → reserve \$300–1,100/year. Start reserves on day one of ownership — a roof does not care that you just bought the property.

References & Standards

Key Reference Standards: International Residential Code (IRC) 2021 • National Electrical Code (NEC) NFPA 70-2023 • International Plumbing Code (IPC) 2021 • International Mechanical Code (IMC) 2021 • International Building Code (IBC) 2021 • OSHA 29 CFR Part 1926 (Construction) • OSHA 29 CFR Part 1910 (General Industry) • Illinois Plumbing Code (77 Ill. Adm. Code 890) • Illinois Accessibility Code (71 Ill. Adm. Code 400) • Illinois Energy Conservation Code (2021 IECC) • ASTM International Standards • ANSI Standards • NFPA 101 Life Safety Code • EPA Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting Rule (40 CFR Part 745) • HUD Housing Quality Standards. Note: Code editions adopted vary by jurisdiction. Verify the edition enforced by your local AHJ.

How to use citations in this guide: When a code section is referenced (e.g., IRC R302.1), the reader should obtain the current adopted edition for their jurisdiction. Code sections referenced are from the 2021 editions unless otherwise noted. Always confirm with your local AHJ which edition is locally adopted and whether local amendments apply.

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