

A FREE GUIDE FROM LA CENTURY LAW

The LA Renter's Rights Guide.

What your landlord hopes you never read.

If you have ever re-read a text to your landlord four times so you don't sound difficult, this is for you. California gives renters real, specific rights, and most people only learn them after something has already gone wrong. This guide is the plain-English version: what the law counts as unlivable, how to build a record that gets taken seriously, where to report, what retaliation looks like, and the deposit rule most people learn about too late.

You don't need to hire anyone to use any of it.

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1

What the law calls uninhabitable.

You are not overreacting. California wrote it down.

California law says every rental has to meet basic livability standards. Not luxury standards, livability. If your home is missing any of these, the law calls it untenable, and it never asks your landlord's opinion first:

A roof and walls that keep water out. Effective waterproofing and weather protection, including unbroken windows and doors.

Working plumbing and gas. In good working order, connected properly.

Hot and cold running water. With fixtures connected to a working sewage system.

Heat. Working heating facilities. There is no "it's LA, you'll be fine" exception.

Safe electrical. Lighting and wiring in good working order at the time of rental, kept that way.

A clean building, free of vermin. Grounds free of garbage, rodents, and pests when you move in, with adequate trash bins.

Floors, stairs, and railings in good repair.

Locks that actually lock. A working deadbolt on the main entry door and working locks on windows are their own legal requirement.

Mold, sewage problems, broken heat, exposed wiring, a front door that will not lock: these are not annoyances you have to live with. They are conditions the law already decided you should not have to.

Cal. Civ. Code §1941.1 (habitability standards) and §1941.3 (locks and security devices).

2

Document like a lawyer.

The record is what makes people take you seriously.

Habitability cases are won and lost on documentation. The good news: building a record takes minutes, not hours.

Put every request in writing. Text or email, so it is dated and saved automatically. If you talk in person or by phone, follow up with a short text: "Just confirming what we discussed today about the leak." Verbal requests are the ones that never happened.

Photograph and video everything, with dates. Your phone stamps them for you. Re-shoot as conditions change.

Keep every reply, and the silences too. A landlord who reads your message and says nothing for three weeks is part of the record.

Log repair visits. Who came, what day, what they did or did not fix.

ONE THING NOT TO DO

Do not just stop paying rent, even when the conditions are terrible. California has specific remedies with specific requirements, and unpaid rent without them can hand your landlord the one thing he wants: a clean reason to evict. Get advice before withholding anything.

3

How to report it.

Reporting is free, and inspectors have authority you don't.

If your landlord will not fix serious conditions, you can bring in the city. An inspector who confirms violations can order repairs, and an official citation becomes powerful evidence in any later dispute.

City of Los Angeles: the LA Housing Department (LAHD) takes complaints online at housing.lacity.gov, by phone at **866-557-RENT (7368)**, or through 311. Filing is free.

Santa Monica, West Hollywood, and other cities: each has its own housing or code-enforcement office. Search your city's name plus "code enforcement" or call your city hall.

Unincorporated LA County: LA County Public Health and county code enforcement handle habitability complaints.

Reporting is a protected step, which matters for the next section.

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Retaliation is illegal.

The law expects your landlord might punish you for complaining. That is why it wrote a rule about it.

Some renters stay silent because they are afraid a complaint means a rent hike or an eviction notice. California anticipated exactly that. If your landlord raises rent, cuts services, or moves to evict you within 180 days of you exercising a legal right, like complaining to the city or requesting repairs in writing, a court may treat it as unlawful retaliation.

This is another reason the dated record from section 2 matters so much: retaliation is proven with timelines. A repair request on the 3rd, an inspector visit on the 10th, and a rent increase on the 15th tells a story a judge can read.

Cal. Civ. Code §1942.5.

5

The 21-day deposit rule.

The rule most renters learn about three weeks too late.

This one is about moving out. After you leave, your landlord has 21 days to either return your security deposit or send you an itemized statement explaining every deduction, with receipts for significant repairs.

Normal wear and tear is not damage. Faded paint, worn carpet in walkways, small nail holes: a landlord cannot bill you for the apartment aging.

You can request a move-out inspection. Ask for an initial inspection before you leave so you have a chance to fix anything they plan to charge you for.

Photograph the empty unit on your way out. Same habit as section 2, one last time.

If a landlord withholds your deposit in bad faith, a court may award you up to twice the deposit on top of what they wrongly kept.

Cal. Civ. Code §1950.5.

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When it becomes a case.

Most repair problems get fixed with a good record and a city inspector. Some don't.

The situations that become legal cases usually share three things: conditions that are genuinely serious, written requests that were ignored, and a landlord who let it go on for months or years. If that is your situation, the record you built with this guide is most of the work already done.

We know these cases because we handle them. LA Century Law has recovered \$1,000,000 for tenants in one habitability case and \$950,000 in another. We represent renters, not landlords, and consultations are free.

Past results do not guarantee future outcomes.

You are not being difficult. You are holding the line the law already drew.

LA Century Law

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