Should You Rekey or Replace Your Commercial Door Locks?

Understanding your options when security needs change

For any business, the security of the premises is a constant concern. When a key is lost, an employee leaves, or you move into a new space, the question of whether to rekey existing locks or replace them entirely comes up. Both approaches have their place, and the right choice depends on several practical factors. This article walks through the differences between rekeying and replacing commercial door locks, helping you make an informed decision for your property.

What does rekeying a lock mean?

Rekeying changes the internal pins and springs of a lock cylinder so that a new key operates it, while the old key no longer works. The lock hardware itself stays in place. A locksmith removes the cylinder, installs new pins that match a different key pattern, and then reassembles the lock. The result is a lock that looks the same and works the same way, but requires a new key. This is a common service for commercial properties where multiple employees have keys and turnover is frequent.

Rekeying is often faster than replacing an entire lock set. Because the existing hardware remains, there is no need to drill new holes, adjust door prep, or match existing finishes. For a business with a consistent door style and hardware brand, rekeying can be a straightforward solution. It also allows you to keep the same master key system if your building uses one, provided the locksmith can rekey to your existing key schedule.

When replacement makes more sense

Replacing a lock means removing the entire lock assembly and installing a new one. This might be necessary if the existing lock is worn out, damaged, or no longer meets security standards. Older locks may have loose tumblers, broken springs, or a cylinder that is simply worn from years of use. In such cases, rekeying a worn lock is only a temporary fix because the internal mechanism can fail soon after.

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Another reason to replace is when you need a different type of lock altogether. For example, upgrading from a standard key-in-knob lock to a heavy-duty cylindrical lock, or adding an exit

device with a panic bar for a fire exit. Replacement also gives you the chance to move to a restricted key system, where keys cannot be duplicated without authorization. Many businesses in Oklahoma City choose this route when they want better control over who has access and who can copy keys.



Comparing costs and time

Generally, rekeying is less expensive than replacing because you reuse the existing hardware. The labor is mostly the locksmith's time to repin the cylinder and test the new key. Replacement involves the cost of new hardware, possible modifications to the door, and more installation time. However, the cost difference narrows if you are rekeying a large number of locks, especially if they are high-security cylinders that require specialized pins.

Time is another factor. Rekeying a single lock can take a locksmith fifteen to thirty minutes on site. Replacing that same lock might take an hour or more, especially if the new hardware does not match the existing prep. For a business that needs to stay operational, minimizing downtime is important. A quick rekey can be completed during a lunch break, while a full replacement may require scheduling after hours.

Master key systems and access schedules

Many commercial properties use a master key system, where a single key opens multiple locks, but each lock also has its own change key. When rekeying, a locksmith can maintain the existing master key hierarchy if the new pins are cut to the same master key code. This is a common request when an employee leaves and you want to reissue keys without changing the entire system.

If you are replacing locks, you have the opportunity to set up a new master key system from scratch. This is useful if the previous system was compromised or if you want to introduce a restricted key profile that cannot be duplicated at a hardware store. Some commercial locksmith services offer a key register, where each key is tracked and replacement keys are only made with your authorization. This level of control is hard to achieve with standard rekeying unless you also replace cylinders with restricted keyway models.

Exit devices and cabinet locks

Commercial doors often have exit devices, also known as panic bars, that allow quick egress in an emergency. Rekeying an exit device is possible, but the cylinder is usually a small rim cylinder or mortise cylinder that can be repinned. Replacement of an exit device is more involved because it affects the entire latch mechanism and the door's function. If the exit device is old or failing, replacement is the safer choice.



Cabinet locks in offices, break rooms, or storage areas are simpler. These can often be rekeyed easily, but replacement is cheap and fast. For cabinet locks, the decision is usually based on whether the current lock is damaged or if you need a different keyway to match a new master key system.

When to call a commercial locksmith

Both rekeying and replacement require a skilled hand. A commercial locksmith understands the differences between door preparations, lock grades, and key systems. Attempting to rekey a lock without proper tools can damage the cylinder, and installing a new lock that does not fit the door prep can leave gaps or misalignments. For a business, the security of the lock is only as good as its installation.

Okey Locksmith provides 24/7 mobile automotive, residential, commercial, access control, and emergency locksmith services in Oklahoma City and nearby communities. Their technicians can assess your current hardware and recommend whether rekeying or replacement is the better option for your situation. Whether you need a single lock rekeyed or a full door upgrade, having a professional handle the work ensures the job is done correctly and securely.

Making the final decision

Start by inspecting your locks. If the hardware is in good condition and the keyway is not worn, rekeying is likely the most cost-effective route. If the lock feels loose, the key sticks, or the finish is peeling, replacement may be worth the extra investment. Also consider your security needs. If you want to upgrade to a restricted key system or a high-security cylinder, replacement is the only way to get there.

For businesses with multiple doors, a maintenance plan can help. Regular inspection and servicing of locks, hinges, and exit devices can catch worn components before they fail. This can reduce the frequency of emergency lockouts and keep your access schedule running smoothly. Okey Locksmith can set up a schedule that fits your building's usage patterns, so you are not caught off guard by a broken lock.



In the end, the choice between rekeying and replacing comes down to the condition of your current hardware, your security goals, and your budget. Both options are valid, and a good locksmith will help you weigh the trade-offs. Do not rush the decision. Take the time to understand your building's needs and choose the solution that gives you peace of mind.

Okey Locksmith, located at 3121 SW 29th St, Oklahoma City, OK 73119, USA, can be reached at +1 405-703-8943 for any commercial locksmith needs.