First Rain, First Leak: How East Bay Landlords Should Triage Winter Repair Calls



Quick Answer

When a tenant reports a leak during the first storms of the season, sort it by what the water is doing right now. **Water actively coming in** (through a ceiling, wall, window or sliding door) is an emergency: get someone out the same day. California law lets you enter without the usual 24-hour notice in an emergency (Civil Code §1954). **A slow drip or a wet sill** is urgent: schedule it within a day or two and give written notice before

> entering. **An old, dry stain** is routine, but check it for moisture and mold. Waterproofing of the roof, exterior walls, windows and doors is a basic habitability requirement (Civil Code §1941.1), and once you have notice of a leak that affects habitability, the law expects a repair within a reasonable time for the circumstances, holiday weekend or not.

Key Facts: Leak Calls in Rainy Season

Question	Answer	Source
Is a roof or window leak a habitability issue?	Yes. Effective waterproofing and weather protection of the roof and exterior walls, including unbroken windows and doors, is a basic habitability standard.	Civil Code §1941.1(a)(1), *required by law*
When does the repair clock start?	When the tenant gives you or your agent written or oral notice of a condition that makes the unit untenantable, such as a failure of waterproofing.	Civil Code §1942(a), *required by law*
How long is “reasonable”?	No fixed number. For repair-and-deduct, acting after 30 days is presumed reasonable, but a tenant can act sooner if the circumstances require it. An active leak is that kind of circumstance.	Civil Code §1942(b), *required by law*

Question	Answer	Source
Can I enter right away?	In an emergency, yes. Otherwise, give reasonable written notice (24 hours is presumed reasonable) and enter during normal business hours unless the tenant agrees otherwise.	Civil Code §1954, *required by law*
What about mold from a leak?	Visible mold (beyond minor mold on surfaces meant to get wet) can make a building substandard. The duty to repair it starts once you have notice.	Health & Safety Code §17920.3(a)(13); Civil Code §1941.7, *required by law*
How fast does AEBP respond?	Water actively coming in is an emergency on our 24/7 line, with a vendor sent the same day. Staining and slow drips go in as work orders.	*AEBP company policy*

Prefer video? Watch the 2-minute video version, with chapter links and a full transcript.

Rental Leak: Emergency or Not? How Landlords Should Triage Storm Leaks

Video Transcript

The first real storm of the season is when you find out where your rental leaks. So when a tenant calls about water, ask one question: what is the water doing right now?

If it’s actively coming in, through a ceiling, a wall, a window or a sliding door, that’s an emergency. Get someone out the same day. California law lets you enter without the usual twenty-four-hour notice to respond to an emergency.

If it’s a slow drip during heavy rain, or a puddle on a windowsill, that’s urgent. Schedule it within a day or two, ask for photos, and give written notice before you go in.

And if it’s an old, dry stain, open a work order, but check it for moisture and mold.

Here’s why it matters. Waterproofing of the roof, walls, windows and doors is a basic habitability requirement in California. Once your tenant tells you about a leak like that, and a phone call or a text counts, the law expects a repair within a reasonable time.

At AEBP, in the week of November sixteenth, our portfolio logged four weather-related maintenance requests. In each of the four weeks before that, zero. Our rule: water actively coming in is an emergency on our twenty-four-seven line, and a vendor goes out the same day.

Holiday weekends are the hard part, so make sure your tenants have your after-hours number, and you know which vendor will pick up when the office is closed.

The full guide, with a triage table and a holiday checklist, is linked below.

Sort the Call First: Emergency, Urgent or Routine

Short answer: ask what the water is doing right now, not what it might do. That one question gets most leak calls into the right bucket.

Tier	What the tenant describes	What to do	Entry rule

Emergency (same day)	Water dripping or running through a ceiling, wall, light fixture, window or slider; a sagging or bulging ceiling; water near outlets or electrical	Send a vendor the same day. Ask the tenant to move belongings, put down towels or a bucket, and stay clear of wet electrical.	Entry without advance notice only if it’s an actual emergency (§1954); otherwise written notice or the tenant’s consent
Urgent (within a day or two)	Drips only during heavy rain; a puddle on a windowsill or at a slider track; damp carpet near an exterior wall	Schedule a vendor promptly and ask the tenant for photos. *(Best practice)*	Written notice, or the tenant’s consent (§1954)
Routine (work order)	An old, dry ceiling stain; peeling paint near a window; gutters that overflowed last storm	Open a work order, inspect, and check for moisture and mold. *(Best practice)*	Written notice (§1954)

Two kinds of calls deserve extra care. Treat water near outlets, light fixtures or wiring as a potential immediate safety hazard. And when a tenant mentions a musty smell or spots on the wall, inspect promptly for mold. Escalate based on the actual risk.

What California Law Actually Requires

Short answer: keep the building weather-tight, and fix what you're told about within a reasonable time. An active leak shortens what "reasonable" means.

- **Weatherproofing is a habitability basic.** Civil Code §1941.1 lists "effective waterproofing and weather protection of roof and exterior walls, including unbroken windows and doors" among the conditions a rental must meet. A roof that leaks in the first rain is a habitability problem, not a cosmetic one.
- **Notice of a habitability problem starts the clock, and it can be oral.** Under §1942, a phone call or a text to you or your agent telling you about a condition that makes the unit untenantable, such as rain coming in, counts as notice. Document and investigate every leak report either way. If you don't fix the problem within a reasonable time, a tenant may be able to repair it and deduct up to one month's rent (no more than twice in 12 months), or move out. The 30-day presumption is a guide, not a grace period.
- **There's an exception for tenant-caused damage.** Repair-and-deduct isn't available if the tenant caused the condition in violation of their own statutory duties (§1942(c), referencing §§1929 and 1941.2).
- **Mold follows leaks.** Health & Safety Code §17920.3(a)(13) treats visible mold growth, as determined by a health officer or code enforcement officer, as a substandard condition. Civil Code §1941.7 says the duty to fix it begins when you have notice, and that you may enter to repair it with proper notice under §1954.

For the full timelines and remedies, see our California repair timelines guide and our habitability guide.

What We See at AEBP When the Rain Comes Back

Short answer: the first storm week is when water problems go from zero to real.

During November 16–20, 2026, our portfolio of 600+ East Bay units logged **four weather-related maintenance requests**. In each of the four comparable Monday–Friday stretches before that: **zero**. To keep the count honest, we left out routine plumbing leaks and requests that only mentioned a past flooding event, so those four are calls the weather caused.

Four calls isn't a flood (sorry). But zero to four in one week is the pattern that matters: problems that were invisible all summer show up the first time the rain arrives at an angle. **Window and sliding-door leaks** are one of the places we see that, once rain is wind-driven instead of falling straight down.

Our rule on the 24/7 maintenance line is simple. **Water actively coming in is an emergency, and a vendor goes out the same day.** Staining and slow drips go in as work orders. We'd rather spend a same-day visit on a leak that turns out to be minor than find out a week later that the ceiling drywall soaked it all up.

Before the Long Weekend: A Thanksgiving Leak Checklist

Vendors take Thursday off. The forecast doesn't. A few things worth doing before the holiday *(best practice)*:

- Make sure every tenant has your after-hours number saved, not just your email.
- Confirm which plumber or roofer will actually pick up on Thursday and Friday.
- Clear gutters and downspouts, and check that downspouts drain away from the foundation.
- Check weatherstripping and the drain holes in sliding-door and window tracks.
- Ask tenants to report a drip the day they see it, with a photo.

Self-Managed vs. AEBP-Managed

Task	If You Self-Manage	With AEBP
Taking the call at 9 p.m. on a holiday	Your phone, your evening	Our 24/7 bilingual maintenance line, (510) 450-3815
Deciding emergency vs. routine	You judge it from a text and a blurry photo	Water actively coming in is an emergency; staining and slow drips are work orders
Finding a vendor the same day	You call around	A same-day vendor for active leaks
Paper trail	Texts and memory	Routine repairs come in as work orders through the AppFolio tenant portal

Bottom Line

Rain season starts with a handful of calls, and how you sort the first one sets the tone for the winter. Ask what the water is doing right now. Active water is a same-day job. Drips and stains get scheduled, with proper notice, and a check for mold. The law gives you a “reasonable time,” and an active leak over a holiday weekend makes that time short. Enjoy the turkey, and keep your phone on.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is a roof leak a habitability issue in California?

Yes. Civil Code §1941.1 lists effective waterproofing and weather protection of the roof and exterior walls, including unbroken windows and doors, as a basic habitability standard. A leak

that lets rain into the unit means the rental isn't meeting that standard until it's fixed.

How fast does a California landlord have to fix a leak?

Within a reasonable time after notice. For the tenant's repair-and-deduct remedy, acting after 30 days is presumed reasonable, but the law allows a shorter window when the circumstances require it (Civil Code §1942(b)). Water actively coming in usually calls for a same-day response.

Can I enter my tenant's unit without notice to stop a leak?

Yes, in an emergency. Civil Code §1954 allows entry without the usual written notice to respond to an emergency. For non-emergency follow-up, such as inspecting an old stain, give reasonable written notice (24 hours is presumed reasonable) and enter during normal business hours unless the tenant agrees otherwise.

Does a text from my tenant count as notice of a leak?

It can. Civil Code §1942 refers to written or oral notice to the landlord or their agent of a condition that makes the unit untenantable, so a phone call or text about rain coming in can start the clock. Keep a record of when each report came in.

What should I do about mold after a leak?

Fix the source of the water first, then deal with any mold. Visible mold growth, beyond minor mold on surfaces meant to get wet, can make a unit substandard under Health & Safety Code §17920.3. Under Civil Code §1941.7, your duty to repair it starts once you have notice, and you can enter to repair it with proper notice under §1954.

Sources

- Waterproofing and weather protection standard (Civil Code §1941.1(a)(1)) — *Required by law.* California Legislative Information

- Notice, reasonable time, repair-and-deduct, tenant-caused exception (Civil Code §1942) — *Required by law.* California Legislative Information
- Entry notice and emergency entry (Civil Code §1954) — *Required by law.* California Legislative Information
- Mold repair duty and entry (Civil Code §1941.7, added by SB 655, 2015) — *Required by law.* California Legislative Information
- Visible mold as a substandard condition (Health & Safety Code §17920.3(a)(13)) — *Required by law.* California Legislative Information
- AEBP's weather-related request count (November 16–20, 2026, vs. the four prior comparable weeks), window and slider observation, and leak triage policy — *AEBP company data and policy*, confirmed by AEBP (November 20, 2026).

Rather Not Take the 9 p.m. Leak Call?

We manage 600+ rental units across Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville and the wider East Bay, with a 24/7 bilingual maintenance line and same-day vendors for active leaks.

Let's Talk About Your Property →

Source: https://alleastbayproperties.com/first-rain-leak-triage-east-bay-landlords/