

Short Term Rental Safety Handbook*

Practical Safety Standards for Responsible Hosts

Introduction: Safety Never Sleeps

Safety is not a one time checklist. It is a continuous commitment that requires attention, awareness, and accountability.

Whether at home, driving a vehicle, or hosting guests in a short term rental, safety depends on constant awareness and a willingness to address potential hazards before they become problems.

Vigilance means recognizing that mistakes, equipment failures, and changing conditions can create risk at any time. A property that was safe yesterday may not remain safe tomorrow without ongoing attention.

Guests also experience your property differently than you do. They are unfamiliar with the layout, equipment, and surroundings. Because of this, hosts must take extra care to identify hazards and provide clear guidance for safe use of the home.

A strong safety culture means checking and rechecking your property, recognizing risks early, and correcting issues before they lead to accidents.

Safety is not a destination. It is a continuous journey.

Hospitality Level Safety Standards

Short term rentals operate in a unique space between residential housing and hospitality businesses. Although most vacation rentals are private homes, they function as lodging for paying guests who may have no familiarity with the property.

Safety experts increasingly emphasize that vacation rentals should meet standards closer to hospitality environments rather than basic residential code requirements.

Features that may be acceptable in a private home can become safety hazards when used by guests. Decks, stairs, pools, bunk beds, and furniture all carry higher risks when unfamiliar visitors are present.

Property owners should evaluate safety carefully before purchasing or converting a home into a short term rental.

**A compilation of the safety tips provided weekly by vacation rental safety expert Justin Ford with Breezeway. Follow Justin at <https://www.justinford.expert/> This list is not a comprehensive list of all safety issues your home may face. Consult home professionals and your insurance company for more advice.*

Important areas to evaluate include:

- fire detection and alarm systems
- emergency exits from bedrooms
- deck and balcony structural safety
- stair handrails and guardrails
- pool safety equipment
- electrical systems and breaker panels

Proactive safety inspections help prevent injuries while protecting hosts from liability and insurance disputes.

Life Safety Systems

The most critical safety systems in a short term rental are those that protect guests during fires or other emergencies.

Every property should include properly installed smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers.

Smoke detectors should be installed in bedrooms and hallways and tested monthly. Detectors should be replaced after ten years.

Carbon monoxide detectors should be installed on every floor, especially near sleeping areas when fuel burning appliances or attached garages are present.

Fire extinguishers should be mounted visibly on every floor and located within thirty feet of the kitchen or outdoor grill.

Guests should also be able to easily locate the property address and emergency contact information.

Emergency Communication and Access

Communication during emergencies is critical.

Hosts should confirm that guests can reach emergency services easily from the property.

Important considerations include:

- reliable cellular service;
- a landline if cellular coverage is weak;
- clear property address information available to guests; and
- driveway access wide enough for emergency vehicles.

Vegetation and obstacles should not block access for fire trucks or ambulances.

The house number and address should be easily visible and identifiable from the street.

Emergency Exits and Egress

Guests must be able to exit the home quickly during a fire or other emergency.

Each sleeping area should have two exit paths, typically a door and a window.

Egress windows should open easily and provide a clear opening large enough for escape. Furniture, air conditioning units, or decorations should never block exit windows.

Clear evacuation pathways should lead from bedrooms directly to the outside of the home.

Water Safety

Pools, hot tubs, and waterfront locations create some of the highest safety risks in short term rentals.

Drowning remains one of the leading causes of death associated with vacation rentals.

Hosts should provide appropriate safety features including:

- pool fencing or barriers;
- door alarms leading to pool areas;
- rescue poles or life rings;
- visible depth markers; and
- clear safety signage.

Hot tubs must be carefully maintained. Poorly maintained water can cause infections such as hot tub rash or Legionnaires disease.

Proper chemical balance and regular servicing are essential.

Airbnb has also introduced water safety reminders for guests staying in properties with pools or waterfront access.

Active supervision of children around water is essential. Many safety organizations recommend using a designated water watcher who focuses entirely on supervising swimmers.

High Risk Amenities

Some features that guests enjoy also introduce safety risks.

Outdoor grills should be placed at least three feet away from structures or combustible materials.

Propane patio heaters should only be used in fully open outdoor spaces and never inside enclosed patios or garages.

Fire pits and grills should include clear instructions for safe operation.

Whenever possible, automatic shut off timers should be installed to prevent fires caused by guests forgetting to turn off gas equipment.

Structural Safety and Fall Prevention

Falls are among the most common causes of injury in residential properties.

Hosts should regularly inspect:

- decks and balconies;
- stairways;
- guardrails and handrails;
- outdoor walkways; and
- driveway surfaces.

Decks should be examined for structural connections, proper bolts, and signs of deterioration. Elevated decks should support adequate weight capacity and include guardrails when more than thirty inches above the ground.

Stairways with four or more risers should have graspable handrails.

Outdoor lighting should illuminate pathways and entry areas to prevent falls at night.

Furniture Safety

Furniture should be inspected regularly for stability and safety.

Tall furniture such as bookshelves, dressers, and television stands should be anchored to walls to prevent tip overs.

Indoor furniture should be stable and free from broken parts or loose joints.

Bunk beds should include guardrails and properly secured ladders. Children under six should not use top bunks.

Window blind cords should be kept out of reach of children to prevent strangulation hazards.

Outdoor furniture should also be inspected for rust, cracks, and loose parts. Chairs and tables should remain stable on decks and patios.

Outdoor grills should be cleaned and inspected regularly, and propane tanks should be stored safely.

Child Safety

Children face unique risks in unfamiliar environments.

Hosts should secure cleaning chemicals, medications, and alcohol in high cabinets or locked storage areas.

Common hazards such as laundry pods, small batteries, and cosmetics should be stored out of reach.

Furniture should be anchored to prevent climbing related tip overs.

Rooms intended for children should allow safe access to exits in case of emergency.

Maintenance and Operational Safety

Small maintenance issues can signal poor property care and may create safety risks.

Common issues include:

- clogged drains;
- malfunctioning appliances;
- burned out lighting;
- loose fixtures; and
- incorrect instructions for equipment or internet access.

Properties should be inspected after each guest stay and receive a more detailed safety inspection several times per year.

Damaged furniture or equipment should be removed immediately rather than left for later repair.

First Aid Preparedness

Every short term rental should include a well-stocked first aid kit.

The kit should contain supplies such as:

- adhesive bandages in multiple sizes
- gauze pads and medical tape
- antiseptic wipes
- antibiotic ointment
- burn gel
- instant cold packs

- disposable gloves
- tweezers and scissors
- hydrocortisone cream
- pain relievers
- antihistamines
- antacids or anti diarrhea medication
- a digital thermometer

Larger homes may benefit from placing first aid kits on multiple floors.

Hosts should check kits regularly and replace expired or used supplies.

Safety Signage

Clear signage helps guests understand how to safely use unfamiliar spaces and amenities.

Safety signs can provide guidance for:

- pool safety rules;
- hot tub instructions;
- bunk bed warnings;
- emergency contact information;
- fire extinguisher locations; and
- dryer lint reminders.

Free downloadable safety signage templates are available here:

<https://www.breezeway.io/safety-signs>

Providing visible safety information reduces confusion and helps prevent accidents.

Regular Safety Inspections

Safety is most effective when it becomes part of a routine inspection process.

Hosts should perform quick checks between guest stays and conduct more thorough inspections several times per year.

Regular inspections help identify hazards early and maintain a property that guests can enjoy safely.

[Download the safety checklist to keep track of each of your properties!](#)