Key checks for commercial door hardware before the rush

Why a pre-season hardware check matters

When a business enters its busiest period, the front door gets pushed open hundreds of times, the back delivery door sees constant traffic, and dozens of employees come and go at all hours. A single sticking lock or a misaligned door closer can cause delays, frustration, or even a security gap. Taking a short walk through the building to examine the commercial door hardware beforehand lets you catch small problems before they become disruptions.

Many issues start small. A latch that feels a bit tight in August can seize up completely by September. A strike plate that is slightly out of alignment might let a door rattle instead of locking securely. The time to notice these things is before the season hits, not during a frantic Monday morning when the first customer cannot get in. Below are the points worth checking, along with the reason each one matters.

Locks and latches

Check that every lock engages fully

On a busy day, a door that does not latch properly can swing open unexpectedly or fail to lock at all. Test each lock by closing the door and trying to push it open from the outside without turning the handle. If the latch bolt does not seat cleanly into the strike plate, the door may need adjustment. A common cause is a loose strike plate or a hinge that has sagged over time. Tightening the strike plate screws and checking the hinges often resolves this.

Inspect the cylinders and keys

For any lock that uses a key, insert the key and turn it a few times. If the key sticks or requires wiggling, the cylinder may have dirt or wear inside. A quick lubrication with a graphite-based product can help, but if the cylinder is old or has been keyed to a master key system for years, it may be time to replace the commercial cylinder. Worn cylinders can fail completely when used frequently, and the worst time to discover that is when a manager needs to lock up after a late shift.



Look at the hardware on high-traffic doors

Doors that get the most use should get the most attention. Check that the latch bolt retracts smoothly when the handle is turned. If it feels gritty or slow, the mechanism inside may be corroded or broken. On panic hardware and exit devices, press the push bar to make sure the latch retracts fully and the bar springs back into place. A stuck exit device is a safety hazard and a code violation.

Door closers and hinges

Test the door closer speed and force

A door closer that slams the door shut is annoying and can damage the frame over time. One that closes too slowly lets heat or conditioned air escape and may not allow the latch to engage. Adjust the closer's valves according to the manufacturer's instructions so the door closes smoothly in about five to seven seconds. If the closer is leaking fluid or will not hold adjustment, plan to replace it before the busy season. A broken closer on a heavy commercial door puts extra strain on every other part of the assembly.

Check hinges for wear

Open and close each door partway and look at the hinges. If a hinge pin is loose or the hinge leaves have bent, the door will sag. A sagging door drags on the frame, wears the latch, and makes the strike plate misalign. Tighten the hinge screws; if they no longer grip, use longer screws that reach into the frame stud. For doors that see heavy traffic, consider adding a third hinge if only two are installed.

Strike plates and frames

Verify the strike plate alignment

The strike plate is the metal piece on the door frame that receives the latch. Over time, settling of the building or repeated impacts can shift it. If the latch only catches the edge of the plate, the door will not lock securely. Remove the strike plate screws, check that the hole in the frame is clean, and reposition the plate if needed. A reinforced strike plate with longer screws adds security and reduces the chance of the frame splitting if someone tries to force the door.

Look at the frame condition

Cracks, dents, or rot in the door frame can prevent the hardware from working correctly. On a metal frame, check for rust around the strike area. On a wooden frame, poke gently near the strike plate to see if the wood is soft. A weak frame cannot hold a lock, no matter how good the lock is. Minor damage can be filled and reinforced, but significant frame damage needs professional repair.

Access control and key systems

Test electronic access points

For businesses that use keypads, card readers, or other access control systems, test every device before the season starts. Replace batteries in wireless locks and readers, clean any sensors that may have collected dust, and confirm that the system logs entries correctly. A reader that fails on a busy day can lock employees out or leave a door unlocked all day.



Review keys and cylinders for changing staff

During a busy season, staff turnover often increases, and temporary workers may come and go. This is the right moment to evaluate your key system. Rather than issuing keys that cannot be controlled afterward, consider using locks for changing staff access. These cylinders allow you to rekey quickly without replacing the whole lock, so you can change access for a departing employee in minutes. One solid approach is to install a restricted key system, where keys cannot be duplicated without authorization. That way, you keep control over who holds keys to sensitive areas.

When you have a large team and need to manage who can enter which parts of the building, the ability to rekey individual cylinders is invaluable. Using locks for changing staff access lets you update permissions as people leave or move roles, without the cost and hassle of swapping out every lock. It is a practical solution for any business that wants to stay secure without constant hardware changes.

Exit devices and safety hardware

Inspect panic hardware

Every door that serves as an emergency exit must have functioning panic hardware. Push the bar firmly and watch whether the latch retracts completely. If the bar sticks or the latch does not pull back all the way, the door could fail to open in an emergency. Also check that the door swings freely and does not rub the frame. Any friction can increase the force needed to open it, and building codes set a maximum push force for exit doors.

Confirm that the door closer does not interfere with the exit device

On some doors, the closer arm can hit the push bar or the trim, limiting how far the door opens. This is especially common on pairs of doors. Make sure the closer is mounted so it leaves full clearance for the exit device. If the door cannot open fully, it may not meet fire code requirements.

Weather seals and thresholds

Check the bottom seal and threshold

Worn weather stripping or a damaged threshold lets drafts, water, and pests inside. During a busy season, a door that leaks air makes the HVAC system work harder and creates an uncomfortable entry for customers. Replace any torn or missing seals. On doors with an automatic drop seal, verify that the seal lowers when the door closes and lifts when it opens. A stuck drop seal can prevent the latch from engaging.



Look at the door sweep

The sweep at the bottom of the door should touch the threshold evenly across its full width. If it is bent or missing, replace it. A good sweep also helps keep the door from rattling in the frame.

Final walk-through

After checking everything individually, do a final walk-through. Open and close every exterior door, listen for unusual noises, and feel for any catch or hesitation. Lock and unlock each door from both sides. If anything does not feel right, address it now. A few minutes of preventive work can save hours of emergency calls during the peak of the season.