

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT · AFTER HOURS · 2026

The 6:40pm Burst Pipe and Your Voicemail

The office closed at 5:30. The recorded message gives an emergency mobile. That phone is face-down on a chair at a school concert. The tenant rings twice, gets nothing, and does the sensible thing: they find a plumber themselves.

Your after-hours phone arrangement is a legal mechanism, not a service preference. Under state and territory tenancy law, once a tenant notifies you of an urgent repair you must arrange it quickly, twenty-four hours is the common benchmark, faster for essential services in some jurisdictions, and a tenant who cannot contact you is generally entitled to arrange the repair and recover reasonable costs up to a limit. **An emergency mobile that rings out does not pause that.** It only removes your evidence of when notification happened, while the tenant's call log records it precisely. **Four things must be true of the after-hours path:** it answers every time; it captures the time and the content; it separates urgent from routine by *asking* the statutory-category questions rather than guessing; and it tells the tenant specifically what happens next.

The short version

Time	What happened	What a different arrangement would have done
6:40pm	Tenant rings the agency number. Recorded message, closed, here is a mobile.	Answered on the first ring. Time recorded. Caller identified against the property.
6:41pm	Tenant rings the emergency mobile. Rings out.	No second call needed. The first call was the notification.
6:52pm	Tenant tries again. Nothing.	By now a property manager has been paged with a transcript and the property address.
7:05pm	Tenant searches for a plumber.	Tenant has been told, specifically, that a plumber is being arranged and someone will confirm within twenty minutes.
8:15pm	Plumber attends at an after-hours rate the agency did not negotiate.	The agency's own trade attends at the agency's rate.
Next morning	Agency learns of the event from an invoice.	Agency learned of it at 6:41pm, and the landlord was informed the same evening.
Six weeks later	Landlord disputes the charge. The only timestamped record is the tenant's.	Two recordings, two timestamps, a triage transcript and a documented authorisation.

■ Also worth knowing

Fact in dispute	What settles it
When it was reported	A timestamped record of the call. The single most common factual dispute in urgent repair matters.
What was described	A recording or transcript. "A bit of water" and "water coming through the light fitting" are different matters with different obligations attached.
Whether you were contactable	Evidence that the call was answered at all. This is the one an unanswered mobile loses outright.
What was promised	A transcript, or a summary written at the time. Verbal commitments in hurried calls are the most common source of complaints from tenants and landlords alike.
Whether the landlord authorised the spend	A record of the authorisation call or a confirming SMS. Frequently the difference between a recoverable and an unrecoverable cost.

Check your own states

Urgent repair categories, timeframes, cost limits and notification requirements differ between jurisdictions, and an agency operating across state lines has more than one set to satisfy. Treat the above as the shape of the obligation rather than as the rule for your state, confirm the specifics for each jurisdiction you operate in, and take advice where a matter is live. **This is design guidance, not legal advice.**

■ Questions the full guide answers

- ☐ What happens if a tenant cannot reach the agent about an urgent repair?
- ☐ Is a recorded message with an emergency mobile number good enough for after hours?
- ☐ What questions should an after-hours service ask a tenant?
- ☐ Why does transcription matter so much in property management?
- ☐ How do you stop property managers drowning in phone calls?
- ☐ Should real estate sales and property management share the same phone number?
- ☐ What should an agency never automate on its phone line?

This is the summary. The guide has the detail.

Every point above is worked through in full on our site, with the Australian context, the numbers and the exceptions. If you would rather talk it through, call 1300 663 222 or visit vocphone.com/about/contact-us.