

# **Falling Brick Over the Doorway: Emergency Lintel Failure and What to Do Tonight**

by Travis Nech

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# Falling Brick Over the Doorway: Emergency Lintel Failure and What to Do Tonight

## What to Do When the Steel Lets Go — Before Morning

by **Travis Nech**

LintelLOCK — [lintlerepair.com](http://lintlerepair.com)

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## Chapter 1: Lintel Failure Emergency — How to Tell You're Having One Tonight

A lintel failure emergency looks like a lot of things, and almost none of them look like an emergency at first.

Sometimes it looks like a crack that wasn't there yesterday — a stair-step running through the mortar joints over your front door, wider at the top than at the bottom, like the wall is trying to unzip itself. Sometimes it looks like one brick sitting lower than its brothers over the window, pushed down half an inch as if something heavy is leaning on it. Sometimes it sounds like it: a rattle, a pop, a mortar crack you hear but can't see, at nine o'clock at night when the house is quiet. And sometimes — the version that gets your heart going — it's a chunk of mortar or an actual brick on the ground under the doorway, and you realize the only reason it's not on somebody's head is luck.

I've been doing this fifty years in Texas, and I'll tell you what fifty years teaches you about a lintel failure emergency: the danger is real, but it's almost never what you think it is, and the safe move is almost never what your gut tells you to do. Your gut tells you to look closer. Get up on a ladder. Push on the loose brick to see how bad it is. Your gut is wrong. The

loose brick is the part you can see. The dangerous part is the thousand pounds of brick above it that you can't see, held up by a piece of rusted steel that just told you it quit.

Here's the first thing to get straight, because it decides everything else you do tonight: a lintel is the steel angle — usually a rusted piece of angle iron — sitting on top of your door or window opening, carrying every brick stacked above that opening. A standard front door in a Texas brick veneer house has a couple thousand pounds of brick leaning on that one piece of steel. When the steel corrodes through, or rusts thin enough to flex, or its ends rot where they bear on the brick — that weight doesn't politely wait. The brick over the opening starts to drop. The first sign is a crack. The next sign is a loose brick. The sign after that is gravity doing what gravity does.

So here's your field test, and it takes thirty seconds: go look at the brickwork over the opening. If you see a fresh crack through the mortar joints — one that wasn't there last week, one you could fit a pencil point into — that's the wall talking. If you see a brick that's moved — pushed down, pushed out, sitting proud of the wall face — that's the wall raising its voice. If you found mortar chunks or brick on the ground, the wall is shouting. And if the opening above is over your front door — the door your family walks under a dozen times a day — don't wait for more evidence.

The question this whole book answers is the one you'll ask tonight: what do I do right now? This isn't the book about how lintels corrode — that's a different book, and I've written it. This isn't the book about how a lintel gets replaced start to finish — written that one too. This is the tonight book. Make it safe. Don't touch the wrong thing. Call the right person in the right order. Understand what happens next so you're not making decisions at midnight with a flashlight and an adrenaline spike. Let's go.

## Chapter 2: What Let Go Up There — The Three Ways a Lintel Quits

When the mason shows up tomorrow, the first thing he's going to determine is which failure you have. There are three, and they matter because they decide whether the fix is a stabilizer visit or a full replacement.

**One: the steel rusted through in the middle.** This is the classic Texas failure, and it's the one I see most on houses from the seventies through the nineties. The builder put in a bare steel angle — no galvanizing, no paint, nothing — and fifty years of humidity, driving rain, and sprinkler water have eaten it from the inside out. The middle of the span is where it

flexes the most and where water sits the longest, so that's where it goes first. The tell: a rust stain bleeding down the brick face right at the center of the opening, and a sag in the brick course above. Sometimes you can see the belly in the wall if you sight down the face of the brick.

**Two: the bearing ends gave out.** A lintel sits on brick at each end — the bearing — and it needs four to six inches of solid brick under each end to do its job. On some houses the builder shorted the bearing, on some the mortar at the ends turned to powder from water intrusion, and on some the steel ends rusted away where they sat in a pocket of damp mortar. The tell: the cracking concentrates at the corners of the opening, running up from the top corners of the door or window frame. The middle of the lintel can look fine while the ends are letting go — and when the ends let go, the whole span drops at once instead of sagging gradually. That's the failure that goes from "crack" to "brick on the ground" the fastest.

**Three: the brickwork itself lost its grip on the steel.** Sometimes the angle is still there and still strong, but the brick laid over it has detached — mortar bonds failed, weep holes clogged, water got behind the veneer and froze or expanded, and now the soldier course — that row of bricks standing on end over the opening — is walking away from the steel. The tell: you can see daylight or a shadow gap between the top of the steel and the bottom of the brick, or the soldier course is leaning out. The steel didn't fail. The wall let go of it.

Why does knowing this matter tonight? Because the second and third failures are the ones where a brick comes out of the wall. A sagging mid-span usually announces itself for weeks — stains, cracks, a visible belly. Bearing failure and bond failure can move fast. If your failure is over a doorway people walk under, you treat all three the same way tonight: keep people out from under it, and don't touch it.

## Chapter 3: The First Ten Minutes — Making It Safe Tonight

Forget the diagnosis. The mason will diagnose tomorrow. Tonight has four jobs, in this order, and none of them involves a ladder.

**Job one: get everyone away from under it.** This is the whole game. A brick weighs about four to five pounds. Dropped from eight feet — the top of a standard door — it lands with enough force to break a bone, crack a skull, kill a small pet. People hear "brick fell" and think "mess." Think "falling object." Move the doormat. If it's the front door, everybody uses the back door or the garage door tonight. If

it's a window, keep the kids and the dog out of that side of the yard. This is not dramatic. It's arithmetic.

**Job two: look from the ground, from ten feet back, with a flashlight.** Don't walk up to it. Don't reach up and touch the loose brick — I'll explain why in the next chapter. Stand back and read the wall like a billboard. Where's the crack? How long is it? Is one brick visibly out of line? Is there mortar on the ground, and how much — a sprinkle or a pile? Take your phone and photograph everything from where you stand. Wide shots first, then zoom in. Those photos are worth money tomorrow — they go to the mason, and if anything about this turns into an insurance conversation, they're your evidence.

**Job three: secure the zone.** If the failure is over the front door, put something in front of the door so nobody walks out under it on autopilot at 6 a.m. — a trash can, a sawhorse, a chair, anything that breaks the habit path. Tape a note on the inside of the door: "Don't use this door — brick falling above." If it's over a window, and you've got kids who play in that yard, rope it off or move the play stuff. Pets get kept on the other side of the house tonight. You're not building a construction site. You're breaking the routine paths that put heads under the danger zone.

**Job four: don't fix it tonight.** I know how this feels. You're a capable person and there's a loose brick and you've got caulk and a tube of construction adhesive and it's 9 p.m. and you'd sleep better if it looked handled. Don't. Squeezing adhesive into a failing lintel joint is like putting a Band-Aid on a cracked windshield — it hides the problem, it gives you false confidence, and it can make the mason's job harder tomorrow when he has to cut through your repair to get to the real one. Worse, it puts your hands and your face right under the thing that just demonstrated it wants to fall down. Leave it alone.

That's the ten minutes. Zone secured, photos taken, nobody under it. You're now safer than 90 percent of the people who find themselves in this situation, because most of them do the opposite of all four.

## Chapter 4: What Not to Touch, Pull, or Push — The Hands-Off Rules

Every year I see the aftermath of somebody's midnight repair instinct. Here's the list of things that feel helpful and are dangerous, and why.

**Don't push on the loose brick to "see how bad it is."** The loose brick is held in place by friction and the brick above it.

Pushing on it is exactly how you convert "loose" into "falling." You will not learn anything useful from the push that the crack didn't already tell you, and you risk learning it on your foot. If you must assess movement, photograph it tonight and photograph it again in the morning from the same spot. The comparison tells you whether it's still moving — no touching required.

**Don't pull a hanging brick out.** Sometimes a brick is dangling — half out of the wall, held by a thread of mortar. It looks like it's about to fall and hurt somebody, so the instinct is to pull it out and get it over with. Don't. That brick may be the only thing wedged against the brick above it. Pulling it can release the one behind it, and then the one behind that, and now you've got a cascade running up the wall. If a brick is genuinely about to fall on a walkway, the move is to extend the keep-out zone, not to play Jenga with the wall.

**Don't poke at it with a stick, a broom handle, or a ladder.** I mention the ladder specifically because somebody always wants to "get a closer look." A closer look tells you nothing the ground-level photo didn't. What the ladder gives you is your head at brick-fall height. Stay on the ground.

**Don't caulk it, don't glue it, don't spray-foam it.** Covered in the last chapter, but it bears repeating because the hardware store is open late and the temptation is real. Anything you put in that joint tonight has to come out tomorrow before real work starts, it gives you a false sense of "handled," and it can trap water behind the repair and speed the corrosion you're trying to stop. The wall needs a mason, not a tube.

**Don't lean anything against the wall under the failure.** No ladders stored there tonight, no trash cans shoved up against the brick, no patio furniture parked under the window. Anything leaning against the wall transmits vibration and pressure into the brickwork, and anything standing under it is in the drop zone.

**The one exception: if a brick has already fallen onto a walkway and people must cross it,** move the fallen brick — the one on the ground — out of the path with your foot or a shovel, wearing shoes. The brick on the ground is safe to move. The bricks still in the wall are not safe to touch. That's the line. Ground: yours. Wall: the mason's.

## Chapter 5: Who to Call First — And Exactly What to Say

Here's the call order, and the order matters.

**Call one: a mason who does lintel work — tonight.** Not a handyman. Not your general contractor buddy. Not the roofer. A mason who replaces steel lintels for a living. This is a specialty, and the guy who does it every week will have you stabilized faster and cheaper than the guy figuring it out. If you're in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and you need [emergency lintel repair Dallas](<https://lintlerepair.com>) can reach tonight, that's the call — LintelLOCK runs the emergency line at (469) 730-0650, and lintel emergencies are the whole reason that number exists. Wherever you are, search for a lintel or masonry contractor who advertises emergency service, and call the one whose website shows actual lintel work, not just tuckpointing.

What to say, word for word: "I've got a failing lintel over my [front door / window / garage door]. [Brick has fallen / mortar is falling / there's a fresh crack and a loose brick]. I need somebody to come shore it up tonight or first thing in the morning. Can you do an emergency stabilization?" Then answer his questions: how wide is the opening, what's above it (one story or two), is anyone hurt (no, we hope), and can he get to it (gate codes, dogs, access). The words "shore it up" tell him exactly what you need — temporary support — and they tell him you're serious, not price-shopping at midnight.

**Call two: your insurance agent — tomorrow morning, not tonight.** The agent's office is closed, and this isn't a 911 call. But call in the morning, because if the failure came from a covered sudden event — a storm, an impact, a tree limb — the clock on documentation starts now, and your photos from tonight are the evidence. (There's a whole book on the insurance question — the lintel-specific version — and the short version is: sudden damage sometimes covered, slow rust almost never. More on that in the chapter on money.) Don't file the claim tonight. Just get the agent's guidance on whether the cause even qualifies before you spend a day on paperwork.

**Do not call 911** unless someone is hurt or the wall is actively collapsing onto a public sidewalk or roadway. A cracked lintel over your private door is a contractor problem, not an emergency-services problem. The exception is a partial wall collapse threatening a public way — then it's the fire department's shoring problem first and your mason's problem second.

**If you're a renter:** call your landlord or property manager tonight, in writing — text or email, not just a phone call. "Brick falling over the front door, photos attached, keeping everyone away from it, need a mason out." Written notice starts their liability clock. If they don't respond by morning, call a mason yourself for the stabilization and keep the receipt — in Texas, a tenant's right to repair-and-deduct has strict

procedures, so don't skip the written notice step. There's more on the renter and property-manager angle later in this book.

What not to do: don't call three masons and take the cheapest midnight bid. Emergency work at night costs more — that's honest, and there's a chapter on it. The goal tonight is one competent mason, on site, shoring the wall. Price-shop the permanent repair tomorrow, in daylight, with three bids like a civilized person.

## Chapter 6: The Shoring — How a Pro Holds Your Wall Up Until Morning

When the mason arrives — tonight, or at first light — the first thing he does isn't repair. It's shoring: temporary support that takes the wall's weight off the failed lintel so the dangerous part stops being dangerous. Understanding what he's doing matters, because a homeowner who understands the shoring doesn't panic when the wall looks like a construction site, and doesn't let an unqualified guy skip it.

The standard move is called needling, and it's beautifully simple. The mason drills or cuts small holes through the mortar joints a couple of feet above the opening — above the failed lintel, into solid brick — and slides steel needles (heavy timber or steel beams) through the wall. Outside, those needles rest on vertical supports — adjustable steel props, the kind that screw up and down — standing on solid ground or on spreader boards. Inside, same thing. The wall above the opening now hangs on the needles, and the needles stand on the props, and the props stand on the earth. The failed lintel is officially unemployed. It can finish rusting in peace without holding up two tons of brick.

For a standard door or window opening, this is a one-to-two-hour job for a crew that does it regularly. For a wide opening — a double garage door, sixteen feet of span — it's a bigger production: more needles, heavier props, sometimes a timber beam (a strongback) spanning the props to spread the load. That's why the mason asked how wide your opening is on the phone.

What the shoring buys you: time. With the wall on needles, the emergency is over. Nobody's in danger. The mason can schedule the actual replacement for daylight, with the right steel on the truck, without the midnight premium. The brick can sit on needles for days or even weeks if it has to — properly installed shoring is stable. It looks alarming — steel posts in your flower bed, timbers through your wall — but it's

the safest your wall has been since the lintel started failing.

Two things to watch while he's doing it. First, the props need solid footing — not soft mulch, not a flower bed that turns to soup when it rains. A good mason puts down timber spreaders or steel plates under the props. If he's setting a prop on bare soft dirt, ask about it. Second, the needles go through mortar joints, not through bricks — through the joint, the weak line, so the wall isn't damaged getting the support in. Holes in mortar joints get repointed in an afternoon. Holes through bricks don't heal.

And here's what the shoring is not: it's not the repair. I've seen homeowners — and I've seen cheap contractors — treat the shoring as the fix. "It's held up fine for six months." No. Shoring is triage. The steel angle is still rusted. The brick is still sitting on temporary needles. The permanent fix is a new lintel, properly flashed, with the brick rebuilt over it. The shoring just buys you the time to do that job right instead of doing it panicked.

## Chapter 7: Why You Don't Build the Shoring Yourself

I can hear some of you. You're handy. You've got jack posts in the garage from the remodel. You've watched the videos. Let me talk you out of it, not because I want the work — there's plenty of work — but because I've seen what goes wrong.

First, the load math isn't intuitive. That brick over your front door weighs roughly 40 pounds per square foot of wall face. A standard door opening with a full story of brick above it is carrying somewhere in the neighborhood of two tons — and it isn't sitting still, it's a veneer wall that can shift as you load and unload it. A jack post from the garage is rated for a load it was designed for, sitting on a footing it was designed for, in an orientation it was designed for. A lally column tipped at an angle against a brick face, standing on a patio slab, is a guess. Guesses under two tons of brick are how people get hurt.

Second, the placement matters more than the post. Needles have to go into solid brickwork above the failure — above the cracked zone, into courses that are still bonded. Put the needle through the failing courses and you're hanging the wall on the part that's already letting go. A mason reads the wall and finds the solid courses. A homeowner guesses. The difference shows up at 3 a.m. when the guess is wrong.

Third, shoring a veneer wall is different from shoring a structure. Your brick is a veneer — one layer of brick over a wood-framed house. The brick isn't holding up your house; the wood frame is. But the brick still weighs tons, and it can

peel away from the frame and fall outward — which is exactly the failure mode you're dealing with. Proper shoring supports the veneer without pushing it, loading it sideways, or tying into the frame wrong. Wrong shoring can actually push the veneer off the wall. I've seen a well-meaning homeowner's 4x4 post do in one afternoon what the rust couldn't do in ten years.

The honest version: if you truly cannot get a mason tonight — rural area, storm knocked out half the county, nobody answering — then the safe homeowner move is not DIY shoring. It's the keep-out zone from Chapter 3, extended and respected until morning. A bigger zone and a locked door beats a guessed shoring every time. Call at first light. The wall waited fifty years to fail; it can wait eight more hours.

## Chapter 8: The Triage Visit — What Happens When the Mason Shows Up

Whether it's 11 p.m. or 7 a.m., the emergency visit follows the same shape. Knowing the shape keeps you from hovering, and keeps you from paying for things you don't need.

**The walkaround comes first.** He'll look at the failure from the ground, then up close — but up close with knowledge of where to stand, which is to the side, never directly under the loose section. He'll read the crack pattern the way I described in Chapter 2: mid-span sag (rusted middle), corner cracking (bearing ends), gap over the steel (bond failure). He'll sight down the wall face for a belly. He'll check the weep holes — those little gaps in the mortar at the bottom of the wall — because clogged weeps mean water's been sitting on the steel for years, and that tells him how far the rust goes. He'll look at the openings next to it, because lintels on the same wall, same age, same exposure, fail on the same schedule — your front door lintel failing means your front window lintels deserve a look.

**Then the shoring,** as described. Needles, props, spreaders. On a standard opening, expect an hour or two. He should explain what he's doing as he goes — a mason who won't tell you the plan is a mason to watch.

**Then the honest conversation.** This is the part that matters. He'll tell you: is this a stabilization-and-schedule job, or is the wall in worse shape than it looks? Most of the time it's the former — shore it, schedule the replacement, done. Sometimes the walkaround finds more: the brick above is delaminating, the bearing pockets are powder, the opening next to it is starting the same dance. A good mason tells you

all of it, prioritizes it, and gives you the permanent fix as a written scope — not a verbal number on the tailgate.

**What the triage visit costs.** Emergency stabilization — the after-hours or first-thing visit with shoring installed — typically runs a few hundred dollars for a standard opening: the call-out, the crew time, the prop rental. It's the cheapest money you'll spend in this whole story, because it's what stands between "scary crack" and "brick on the sidewalk." Get the receipt itemized: call-out fee, shoring labor, materials. That receipt matters if insurance enters the picture.

**What to ask before he leaves:** How long can the shoring stay up safely? (Weeks, if done right — but get his number.) What's the permanent fix, in writing? When can he schedule it? And the big one: are the other lintels on this wall suspect? Write down the answers. Adrenaline makes for bad memory.

## Chapter 9: How the Emergency Replacement Unfolds — The Week After Tonight

The shoring bought you time. Here's how that time usually gets spent, so the week doesn't feel like limbo.

**Day one or two: the permanent bid.** The mason comes back in daylight — or sends the detailed scope from the triage visit — with the full replacement priced: shoring already in place (that cost is sunk and it helped), old steel out, new steel in, brick rebuilt, mortar matched, flashing installed, weep holes cleared. For a standard window or door lintel, the 2026 replacement ranges run roughly \$1,000 to \$3,000 for a window and \$1,500 to \$4,000 for a door, depending on the opening width, the height, the brick condition, and how much of the surrounding brickwork has to come apart. Wide openings — double doors, garage spans — run higher, and emergency scheduling can add a premium if you're jumping the queue. The ranges are wide because the jobs are genuinely different: a ground-floor window with good access and sound surrounding brick is one job; a second-story door with delaminating brick and no access is another. "Depends on" isn't evasive here — it's the truth.

**The steel decision.** The replacement lintel should be galvanized or properly coated steel — not another bare angle. This is the single most important upgrade in the whole job, and it's where cheap bids cheat: same bare steel the builder used, same fifty-year fuse. Ask what the steel is and how it's protected. If the bid doesn't say, it's bare.

**The flashing decision.** A proper lintel replacement includes

flashing over the steel — a waterproof membrane that catches the water coming down through the wall and throws it out the weep holes instead of letting it sit on the steel. The original builder skipped this on most Texas houses, which is why you're reading this book. The flashing is cheap material and real labor, and it's the difference between a lintel that lasts thirty years and one that lasts eighty. If a bid skips the flashing, it's not a complete bid.

**Day three to five: the work.** A standard lintel replacement takes one to two days on site; a door or a wide opening, two to three. The crew works under the shoring that's already up, cuts out the old steel, sets the new, rebuilds the brick, matches the mortar, installs the flashing, clears the weeps. There's dust — cutting brick makes dust — and there'll be a period where your doorway looks like a construction zone. That's normal. That's the job being done right.

**The sign-off.** When it's done, walk it with the mason. The brick courses should be level — sight down the wall face the way he did on night one. The mortar should match — not perfectly, because new mortar and thirty-year-old mortar are never identical twins, but close enough that your eye doesn't snag on it. The weep holes should be open — stick your finger near them, feel the air. Get the warranty in writing: workmanship, and what it covers. Then the shoring comes down, the props go back on the truck, and your doorway is a doorway again.

I'm deliberately keeping this chapter at the week level, not the hour level. I've written the full step-by-step of a lintel replacement as its own book — every cut, every course, the whole dusty day. This book is about the emergency. The emergency ends when the shoring goes up. Everything after is a scheduled job, and scheduled jobs deserve daylight, three bids, and no panic.

## Chapter 10: What the Emergency Costs — The Honest Money Chapter

Let's talk money the way I'd talk it at your kitchen table.

**The stabilization** — the tonight-or-first-thing visit with shoring — is the smallest check you'll write: typically a few hundred dollars. Call-out fee, an hour or two of crew time, prop rental. Some masons roll it into the replacement price if you hire them for the permanent fix. Ask.

**The permanent replacement** carries the ranges from the last chapter: roughly \$1,000 to \$3,000 for a standard window

lintel, \$1,500 to \$4,000 for a standard door, more for wide spans and second-story work. Those are 2026 Texas ranges for competent work — licensed, insured, proper steel, flashing included, mortar matched, cleanup done.

**The emergency premium** is real and it's honest. If you're asking a crew to come at 10 p.m., or to bump three scheduled jobs to get yours done tomorrow, expect to pay for the privilege — typically a meaningful bump over the scheduled price, sometimes structured as a flat emergency fee on top of the job. This isn't gouging. It's overtime, rescheduling costs, and the simple fact that the mason's family was having dinner. A mason who charges the same at midnight as at noon is either not busy enough or not honest about something else. Pay the premium without resentment, and price-shop the permanent work in daylight.

**What moves the number**, same as any lintel job: opening width (a 3-foot window versus a 6-foot door versus a 16-foot garage span — the steel, the shoring, and the brickwork all scale), height (second-story work means scaffolding or a lift), brick condition (if the surrounding brick is delaminating, more of it has to be rebuilt), access (can the truck get there, is there room for props), and steel choice (galvanized versus bare — and you want galvanized, always).

**What shouldn't move the number:** fear. The oldest trick in emergency contracting is the midnight price that doubles by morning — "I can do it tonight for \$8,000, or next week for \$4,000." That's not a premium, that's a pressure tactic. The honest structure is: stabilization tonight at the emergency rate, permanent replacement scheduled and bid in daylight at the normal rate. Any mason who won't separate those two is telling you who he is. Let him tell you, and then call the next one.

**The insurance question** gets its own book — the lintel-specific one — because it's complicated enough to deserve it. The thirty-second version: if the failure was sudden — storm damage, an impact, a tree limb — your homeowners policy may cover the repair, and tonight's photos are your evidence. If it was slow rust over decades, that's maintenance, and maintenance is on you. Don't let a contractor promise you he'll "get insurance to pay for it" on a rusted-out fifty-year-old angle. He can't. And a mason who leads with insurance instead of shoring has his priorities wrong.

## Chapter 11: When It's Not an Emergency — The

## Urgent-But-Not-Tonight Cases

Not every scary lintel is a tonight problem. Knowing the difference saves you the emergency premium and saves the mason's midnight for somebody who truly needs it. Here's how to triage your own situation honestly.

**Rust stain, no crack, no movement.** You see the orange-brown bleed on the brick over the window. The mortar joints are intact. No crack, no displaced brick, nothing on the ground. That's not an emergency — that's a warning with a long fuse. The steel is corroding, and it's telling you so years in advance, the way it's supposed to. Get a mason out within the month for an assessment. You might buy years with a cleanup and coating, or you might schedule a replacement on your terms. Either way: daylight, three bids, no panic.

**Hairline crack, no displacement.** A thin crack through the mortar over the opening — pencil-line, not pencil-point — with every brick still exactly where it was laid. That's urgent, not emergent. The wall is talking, but it hasn't raised its voice. Get it looked at within a week or two. Don't ignore it for a year — hairlines become stair-steps — but don't pay midnight rates for it either.

**Stair-step crack, no loose brick, no debris.** The crack is walking down through the joints in steps, and it's wider than a hairline. The bricks haven't moved. Nothing's on the ground. This is the gray zone, and the honest answer is: it depends on the opening. Over a window nobody stands under, it's a this-week problem. Over the front door your kids run under fifty times a day, I'd rather see shoring up sooner than later. When in doubt, make the call and describe exactly what you see — a good mason will tell you over the phone whether it's a tonight visit or a this-week visit, and he'll be right, because he'd rather not roll a truck at midnight either.

**Loose brick, debris on the ground, visible sag.** That's tonight. That's this book's first ten chapters. Zone, photos, hands off, call the mason.

**The rule of thumb:** the emergency line is crossed when something has moved or fallen — brick displaced, mortar on the ground, a course visibly out of line. Cracks and stains are the warning system. Movement is the event. Respect the difference, and you'll spend your money where it counts.

One more honest note: lintels fail on schedules, and your house has several. The front door lintel and the front window lintels went in the same year, from the same steel, under the same sky. When one fails, the others are on the same clock. The emergency visit is the time to ask the mason to eyeball the rest — not to sell you five replacements, but to tell you

which ones are showing the early signs. A rust stain over the bedroom window today is a scheduled replacement next spring instead of a midnight call next winter. That's how you turn one emergency into zero more.

## Chapter 12: Loose Brick Over a Window vs. Over a Door — Why the Stakes Differ

The physics is the same. The risk is not. Where the opening is decides how fast you move.

**Over the front door:** maximum urgency. This is the highest-traffic square footage on your property. Family, guests, delivery drivers, kids running in from the bus — everybody passes under it, most of them without looking up. A falling brick over a front door doesn't need bad luck to find a head; it just needs Tuesday. Until the shoring is up, that door is closed. Full stop. Use the garage, use the back door, put the note on the inside. I've seen homeowners leave the front door in service "just for today" with a loose brick over it. Don't be that homeowner.

**Over a back or side door:** same physics, slightly lower traffic, same rule. If people use it, it's closed until shored. If it's a door nobody uses — the side door to the utility room that's been painted shut since 2009 — rope it off and leave it. The danger is a function of heads, not doors.

**Over a ground-floor window:** the drop zone is the ground under the window — usually a flower bed, not a walkway. Lower risk to people, but not zero: kids, pets, the gardener, you with the hose. Keep the zone clear, keep the pets on the other side, and get it handled this week. The one exception: a window over a patio, a deck, or anywhere people sit. A brick falling onto a patio table where somebody eats breakfast every morning is a front-door situation wearing a window's clothes. Treat it like one.

**Over a second-story window or door:** the brick falls farther, which means it lands harder and bounces further. The drop zone is bigger than you think — a brick falling twenty feet doesn't land politely at the wall's base. Rope off a generous zone, warn the neighbors if it's near a property line, and keep everyone clear until the mason's been. Second-story work also means the permanent fix involves scaffolding or a lift, which is part of why it costs more. That's honest money.

**Over the garage door:** wide span, heavy load, and it's the opening most likely to have the worst failure — sixteen feet of brick on a steel angle that was undersized the day it was

installed. (Garage lintels are their own saga; I've written that book too.) The good news: nobody stands under the middle of a garage door opening for long. The bad news: the failure can be sudden and large — bearing ends letting go on a wide span drops a lot of brick at once. Don't park in the garage until it's shored if the failure is advanced. A car is replaceable; the point is you don't want to be in the car when it happens.

**The pattern:** match the response to the traffic, not just the crack. Same crack over a disused side window and over the front door gets a different clock. That's not cutting corners — that's triage, and triage is the whole subject of this book.

## Chapter 13: Renters, Landlords, and Property Managers — The Liability Chapter

If you don't own the building, the emergency has a second layer: whose problem is it, and how do you protect yourself while it's getting fixed.

**Renters:** the structure is the landlord's responsibility — full stop. A failing lintel is not a clogged drain; it's a structural safety issue, and in Texas the landlord has a duty to address conditions that threaten health and safety. Your job tonight is the same four jobs from Chapter 3 — zone, photos, hands off, keep people clear — plus one more: written notice to the landlord or property manager, tonight, with the photos attached. Text and email both. "Brick falling over the front door at [address]. Photos attached. Keeping everyone away from the door. This needs a mason immediately." Written notice matters because it starts a paper trail. If the landlord drags their feet and somebody gets hurt, that trail is everything.

If the landlord doesn't respond by morning, call a mason yourself for the emergency stabilization — the shoring, not the full replacement — and keep every receipt. Texas law gives tenants a repair-and-deduct path, but it has strict steps: proper notice, reasonable waiting time, and the repair has to be necessary. Follow the steps. Don't skip to deduct. And don't let a landlord talk you into "just caulking it" — a structural failure patched with caulk is a liability time bomb, and you don't want your name on it.

**Landlords and property managers:** if you're reading this because a tenant called you about falling brick, here's the straight talk. This is the kind of issue that turns into a lawsuit if it's handled slowly and a non-event if it's handled fast. Get a mason out for stabilization immediately — tonight if there's been displacement, this week if it's cracks and stains.

Document everything: the tenant's notice, your response time, the mason's visit, the scope. Your insurance carrier wants to see a fast, professional response. A jury wants to see one too. The stabilization costs a few hundred dollars. The alternative costs whatever a falling-brick injury costs, and you don't want to know that number.

Property managers with portfolios: when one lintel fails on a building, check the others — same wall, same age, same exposure. And put lintel inspection on your turnover checklist. A five-minute look at the openings during every make-ready — rust stains, cracks, displaced brick — catches these a year before they become midnight calls. The most expensive lintel is the one that fails on a tenant-occupied property at 11 p.m. The cheapest is the one you scheduled in daylight between tenants.

**The liability nobody talks about:** the sidewalk. If your building's brick falls onto a public sidewalk and hurts a passerby, you're not just dealing with a repair — you're dealing with premises liability. This is why the keep-out zone in Chapter 3 extends to the public way when the failure is over a door near the street. Rope it off, sign it, photograph the rope and the sign. Reasonable care, documented. That's what the law asks, and it's what decency asks too.

## Chapter 14: Kids, Pets, and the Days Between — Living Around It

The shoring is up. The mason comes Tuesday. It's Saturday. Life doesn't pause for masonry. Here's how to live around a shored opening without incident.

**Kids.** Tell them straight, in kid words: "The bricks over the door are sick, and the doctor put a cast on them. We don't touch the cast, and we don't play near it until the doctor takes it off." Kids respect a clear rule with a reason. What they don't respect is a vague "stay away from there" with no explanation — that's an invitation to investigate. Show them the props. Let them see it's serious. Then enforce the zone like you mean it, because the one time you don't is the time.

**Pets.** Dogs don't read notes on doors. If the failure is over the door the dog uses, the dog uses a different door — full stop, no exceptions, even if it's inconvenient. Move the food bowls if they're near the zone. Cats that go in and out: keep them in until the fix is done. A brick doesn't care that your cat has done this route ten thousand times.

**The zone over multiple days.** The trash-can-and-note setup from night one gets tired by day three. Upgrade it: proper rope or caution tape, a clear path marked to the alternate

door, and if the failure is over the front door, tell your regular visitors — the housekeeper, the lawn guy, the delivery drivers — which door to use. A strip of tape across the walk with a note takes two minutes and prevents the one autopilot walk-under that ruins the week.

**Weather.** Texas weather doesn't care about your shoring schedule. If a big storm is coming — one of our spring gusters or a norther — check that the keep-out zone is still marked after it passes, and eyeball the shoring from a distance. Properly installed shoring handles weather fine; it's the tape and the trash cans that blow away. Re-mark the zone. And if the storm was the kind that throws tree limbs, give the mason a call in the morning — not because the shoring failed, but because it's worth a professional eye after a beating.

**The mental game.** A shored doorway looks alarming, and alarming gets exhausting. Remind yourself: the shoring means the dangerous part is over. The wall is now safer than it was the day before you noticed the crack, because now the weight is on steel posts standing on the ground instead of on a rusted angle. The ugly props are the fix working. Tuesday comes. The mason does his day or two. The props go back on the truck. You'll forget what the worry felt like — until you see a rust stain on a neighbor's house and tell them about this book.

## Chapter 15: After the Fix — Making Sure It Never Happens Again

The new lintel is in. The mortar matches. The weeps are open. Here's how you keep it that way — because the whole point of a proper replacement is that you never read the first fourteen chapters again.

**The steel is different now.** The original failed because it was bare steel in a wet wall. The replacement should be galvanized or coated, sitting under proper flashing, with open weep holes throwing water out. That combination doesn't rust on a fifty-year fuse — it lasts generations. If your mason put in another bare angle with no flashing, you didn't get a permanent fix; you got a fifty-year timer reset. Ask what went in. You paid for the answer.

**The sprinklers.** I'm going to say it in every book I write until Texas stops doing it: if your irrigation sprays the brick wall, redirect it. Daily sprinkler water on brickwork is the single most preventable accelerator of lintel corrosion — constant wet-dry cycling, water driven straight at the steel's hiding place. Walk your system. Watch where every head throws.

Any head hitting brick gets adjusted, redirected, or replaced with a drip line. It's a Saturday morning and it buys your lintels decades.

**The weep holes.** Those little gaps at the bottom of the wall, every couple of feet — they're the drainage system. They clog with mortar droppings, mud daubers, mulch, paint. Once a year, walk the wall and make sure they're open. A straightened paper clip, a gentle poke — that's the whole maintenance program. Clogged weeps mean water sits on your new steel. Open weeps mean it leaves. This is a two-minute job that protects a multi-thousand-dollar repair.

**The annual look.** Once a year — pick a month, make it a habit — walk your openings and look for the early signs: rust staining on the brick face, hairline cracks over openings, mortar crumbs at the base of the wall. You're looking for the warnings, not the emergency. Catch a rust stain in year three and it's a conversation. Catch it in year thirty and it's this book again.

**The other lintels.** Your house has a lintel over every opening — every window, every door, the garage. They went in together and they age together. When one gets replaced, have the mason give the rest a condition read: which ones are showing early signs, which ones are clean. You're building a schedule, not buying fear. A lintel replaced on your terms, in daylight, scheduled between other projects, costs less and disrupts nothing. That's the whole philosophy: emergencies are expensive, maintenance is cheap, and the difference is attention.

## Chapter 16: Questions Homeowners Ask Me

**Can a lintel actually collapse, or does it just sag?** Both. The slow version is the sag — years of rust, gradual belly in the wall, cracks widening. The fast version is bearing-end failure or bond failure, where a section of brickwork lets go at once. I've seen both in fifty years. The slow version is more common. The fast version is why this book exists. Either way, "just a sag" still ends with brick on the ground eventually. Sag is collapse in slow motion.

**My brick fell but the steel looks okay — what happened?** Probably bond failure — the brick detached from the steel, or the mortar in the courses over the steel failed, while the angle itself is still sound. It happens with clogged weep holes and water intrusion: the water gets behind the veneer, the mortar softens, and the brick walks away from the steel. The fix may be rebuilding the brickwork over the existing steel rather than replacing the steel — but let the mason make that call

after he's seen it shored and opened up. Don't diagnose from the ground.

**How long can the shoring stay up?** Weeks, comfortably, if it was installed right — solid footing, needles in sound brickwork, props plumb. It's temporary by design, not by fragility. But don't let "temporary" become "indefinite." Shoring doesn't stop the underlying corrosion, and life has a way of turning "next month" into "next year." Schedule the permanent fix and keep the date.

**Will my homeowners insurance cover this?** Sometimes — if the cause was sudden and covered: storm damage, impact, a falling tree. Almost never if the cause was slow rust and age — that's maintenance. Document everything from night one: photos, the mason's written diagnosis of the cause, receipts. The full playbook is in the insurance book — the lintel-specific one. The short version for tonight: photograph first, ask questions later.

**Can I just take the loose brick out and mortar it back myself?** If one brick fell out and the lintel and surrounding brickwork are sound — a mason's judgment, not yours — repointing a single brick is a small job. But a fallen brick is a symptom until proven otherwise. Get the opening assessed before you decide it's "just one brick." The brick that fell is telling you about the ones that haven't.

**The mason wants to replace all my lintels. Is he upselling me?** Maybe, maybe not. Here's the test: ask him to show you the early signs on each one — rust staining, cracking, displacement — and to rank them by urgency. An honest mason can point to evidence and give you a schedule: this one now, that one in two years, those two are clean. A salesman gives you a package price and urgency on all of them. Evidence and ranking is honest. Package urgency is a pitch.

**Is a collapsed lintel over the garage door dangerous to park under?** Until it's shored, don't park under an advanced failure — and don't stand under it loading groceries either. A wide-span failure can drop a lot of brick at once. After shoring, the mason will tell you when it's safe. When in doubt, the driveway is free.

**What if this happens at a house I'm buying?** A failed or failing lintel on an inspection report is a negotiation item, not a dealbreaker — I've written a whole book on buying a house with rusted lintels. The emergency version: if brick is actively falling, the seller needs to stabilize before closing, because you don't want the liability transferring to you mid-fall. Get the mason's scope in writing, get it done before you close, or get the credit and schedule it day one.

# A Final Word Before Morning Comes

Here's what I want you to take from this book, if you take nothing else: tonight has four jobs. Keep people out from under it. Photograph it from the ground. Mark the zone. Don't touch it. Everything else — the mason, the shoring, the steel, the money — is tomorrow's work, and tomorrow's work goes better when tonight's work is done right.

A lintel failure feels like an emergency because it is one — but it's an emergency with a known shape, a known fix, and a straight path from tonight to done. The wall told you it was failing. You listened. You kept everybody safe. You called the right person. That's the whole job tonight, and it's enough.

In the morning, the mason shores it, the danger ends, and the rest is a scheduled repair — daylight, three bids, proper steel, flashing, matched mortar. A month from now it'll be a story you tell at dinner. A year from now you'll walk your walls once a year and catch the next one as a rust stain instead of a midnight call.

Your wall talked. You listened. That's what good homeowners do.

If you're in North Texas and tonight is your night, [emergency lintel repair Dallas](<https://lintlerepair.com>) is what the LintelLOCK line is for — (469) 730-0650. And when the dust settles and you want to understand the rest of what your brick is saying, my [free books library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>) has the whole shelf — including the full step-by-step of a lintel replacement and the Texas corrosion story, so the next warning sign never becomes a midnight call.

## About the Author

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work. He owns [Champion Brick Repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — (817) 900-6324 — [Metro Foundation Repair](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) — (817) 670-4474 — and the [LintelLOCK](<https://lintlerepair.com>) lintel system — (469) 730-0650. All his books are free at [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).