



THE FUTURE OF ACCESS CONTROL

■ 7 Surprising Insights From Multifamily Professionals



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Introduction

Smart Locks Are Replacing Traditional Keys — Or Are They?

Industry experts frequently hail smart lock technology as the future of multifamily access control. In one survey, more than 70% of multifamily property managers and owners expressed interest in smart door locks.¹ Another study revealed that 67% of renters were willing to pay extra for keyless smart locks.²

Based on this data, it appears the market is embracing smart home technology. But the reality is more complex. In 2022 and again in 2024, we asked property management professionals their thoughts on smart locks. While some properties are making the switch to smart locks, the majority remain hesitant, with 81% of respondents in 2024 reporting no plans to implement smart locks — up from 67% just two years earlier.

These findings raise important questions: If smart locks offer such clear advantages, why are so many properties holding back? And how can you make the best access control decisions for your property, whether you choose smart locks or stick with traditional keys?

In this report, we'll uncover surprising insights from multifamily professionals and explore the factors driving — and hindering — the shift to smart locks. Finally, we'll discuss how to balance security, convenience, and operational efficiency.



Survey Dates and Demographics

Our survey gathered responses from 259 multifamily professionals across two years: 117 in 2022 and 142 in 2024, with property managers being the majority of respondents (80%). The survey pool primarily consisted of professionals aged 25 to 44, with 28% falling into the 35 to 44 age bracket and 24% in the 25 to 34 range.

Survey dates

Response	Total Respondents n=259	%
2022	117	45%
2024	142	55%

What job title best suits your role?

Response	Total Respondents n=259	%
Property manager	208	80%
Other management	20	8%
Leasing agent	14	5%
Assistant property manager	7	3%
Maintenance professional	4	2%
Refused	6	2%

What age bracket do you fall in?

Response	Total Respondents n=259	%
18-24	4	2%
25-34	61	24%
35-44	72	28%
45-54	37	14%
55-64	14	5%
65+	4	2%
Refused	67	26%



Insight #1: Traditional Locks Are Still Common

Do you use smart locks/keyless entry, traditional locks, or a combination of both?

Response	2022 n=142	2024 n=117
Traditional Locks	61%	76%
Smart Locks/Keyless Entry	8%	7%
Both	30%	16%
Don't know/Refused	0%	1%

What types of traditional metal keys do you still use?

Response	2022 n=55	2024 n=27
Common areas	40%	26%
Offices	64%	37%
Backups	58%	33%
Storage areas	67%	33%
Primary apartment keys	36%	56%
Closets	20%	37%
Mailboxes	2%	4%
Almost everything	9%	7%
Amenities	0%	4%
The main doors	4%	7%

Each respondent was able to provide multiple answers to this question. Green highlighted responses were specifically asked of each respondent in the survey. All other answers were put into text boxes by the respondent.

Despite the smart technology available, multifamily properties aren't abandoning traditional keys. In 2022, 61% of respondents said their properties use traditional keys. Rather than decreasing in 2024, the number rose to 76%. Meanwhile, exclusive smart lock usage dropped from 8% to 7%. Those using a combination of methods fell by nearly half, from 30% to 16%.

Of the respondents whose properties use both smart locks and traditional keys, 56% rely on metal keys as the primary means of apartment access, while a third keep them on hand as backups to smart locks. In addition, 26% to 37% use traditional locks for common areas, offices, storage spaces, and closets.

Familiarity likely plays a role in the reliance on traditional keys. Given that traditional keys have been a part of multifamily operations for decades, properties might be hesitant to change their existing access control methods.

Insight #2: Many On-Site Staff Are Indifferent About Access Control Methods

How do you feel about smart locks?

Response	2022 n=142	2024 n=117
We love them	31%	25%
We're indifferent	39%	44%
They're not a good fit for our community	18%	18%
Don't know/refused	12%	14%

How do you feel about traditional metal keys?

Response	2022 n=142	2024 n=117
We prefer them	28%	32%
We're neutral	54%	51%
We prefer keyless entry	15%	15%
Don't know/refused	3%	2%

When asked about how they feel about both smart locks and traditional metal keys, 44% of respondents in 2024 were indifferent about smart locks, while 51% felt the same way about traditional keys.

Of those who expressed stronger opinions, 25% said they loved smart locks (down from 31% in 2022), and 32% said they preferred traditional keys (up from 28% in 2022). In both years, 18% said smart locks weren't a good fit for their community, while 15% said they preferred keyless entry over traditional keys.

This data could indicate that many multifamily professionals see access control methods as practical tools. This stance could also reflect that both systems have their pros and cons, making respondents ambivalent rather than strongly favoring one over the other.

Insight #3: Convenience, Not Security, Drives Smart Lock Adoption

Why did your property implement smart locks?

Response	2022 n=142	2024 n=117
They provide security	0%	0%
They're the way of the future	49%	26%
Other locations within our organization use them	45%	26%
They make lockout situations easier to work with in general	44%	33%
End users requested them	13%	15%

Response	2022 n=142	2024 n=117
We wanted to avoid having to rekey locks	36%	22%
Smart locks are easier to work with	11%	19%
The building already had smart locks when we acquired it	4%	11%
It was a corporate decision	7%	4%
Don't know/refused	7%	4%

Each respondent was able to provide multiple answers to this question. Green highlighted responses were specifically asked of each respondent in the survey. All other answers were put into text boxes by the respondent.

When respondents at communities with smart locks were asked why their property implemented smart locks, the main reasons were operational factors:

- Avoiding rekeying (22%)
- Standardizing technology across the organization’s properties (26%)
- Viewing them as the way of the future (26%)
- Simplifying lockout situations (33%)

Only 15% of respondents cited resident requests as a reason, and none explicitly mentioned security. These responses suggest that convenience, not security or resident demand, is driving adoption.



Insight #4: Smart Locks Introduce New Operational Challenges

While multifamily communities implement smart locks for operational benefits, they also bring challenges that demand staff time and potentially slow down processes. In 2024, respondents cited issues with:

- Dead batteries (30%)
- The time required to program new fobs, codes, etc. (22%)
- Other challenges (26%)

Compared to 2022, programming difficulties and other issues decreased, suggesting staff might be growing accustomed to managing smart locks. Additionally, concerns like software malfunctions dropped sharply, from 31% in 2022 to 4% in 2024. This shift could indicate improvements in the technology or user familiarity.

However, there are still areas for improvement. Dead batteries, for example, are a persistent problem, with reports rising from 24% in 2022 to 30% in 2024.

Despite these operational challenges, only 15% of respondents reported receiving complaints from end users. Yet the nature of the complaints mirrored the issues multifamily professionals highlighted, such as:

- Difficulty operating the system or understanding its features
- Programming issues
- Doors not opening or closing as expected, either due to user error or system glitches
- Concerns about battery-powered locks unexpectedly dying or causing inconvenience
- Cards or fobs randomly deactivating
- Lost or misplaced cards/fobs

This feedback reveals that both on-site staff and residents can adapt to smart locks. But long-term success requires training, access to product support, and a plan for managing dead batteries.

Do you receive complaints about smart locks/ electronic locks from end users?

Response	2024 n=117
Yes	15%
No	85%
Don't know/refused	0%

Respondents who have smart locks at their property were asked this question.

What are your biggest smart lock challenges?

Response	2022 n=55	2024 n=27
Finding time to program new fobs, codes, etc.	36%	22%
Outsiders hacking or discovering codes	9%	0%
Software malfunctions	31%	4%
Dead batteries	24%	30%
End user complaints	9%	4%
Employee training	16%	0%
Other	24%	22%
Don't Know/refused	16%	26%

Each respondent was able to provide multiple answers to this question.

Insight #5: Not All Multifamily Professionals Believe Smart Locks Are Safer

Overall, do you believe smart locks are safer than traditional locks?

Response	2022 n=142	2024 n=117
Yes	31%	38%
No	50%	44%
Don't know/Refused	19%	18%

When we asked respondents if they believe smart locks are safer than traditional keys, only 38% said yes, while 44% said no, and 18% were unsure. These results show little change from 2022, when only 31% felt smart locks were safer and 50% disagreed. These responses underscore the idea that multifamily professionals associate smart locks more with convenience than security.

“

A smart lock is **amazing** when it works, but whenever it malfunctions it's a **disaster**.”

“

We have issues with theft, and I believe smart locks would make our community more available to have theft happen. Those systems **can be compromised easily** from what I've been told by other communities that utilize them.”

“

I prefer traditional keys because **they're more secure**.”

Insight #6: Some Properties Aren't Securely Storing Fobs and Access Cards

How are your smart locks controlled?

Response	2022 n=55	2024 n=27
Smartphones	18%	15%
Fobs	67%	70%
Access cards	5%	11%
Keypad	29%	26%
Don't know/refused	0%	4%

Each respondent was able to provide multiple answers to these questions.

How do you manage your smart lock fobs and/or access cards?

Response	2022 n=55	2024 n=27
We keep them in a drawer, cabinet, or other easily accessible location	42%	41%
We hang them on a pegboard.	0%	0%
We store them in an electronic key control system	36%	33%
Employees/residents keep them on their person at all times	5%	11%
We store them in a second office	2%	4%
Don't know/refused	15%	11%

Each respondent was able to provide multiple answers to these questions.

One noteworthy takeaway is that 81% of respondents with smart locks said their systems use fobs or access cards. Of these, 41% said they store these fobs or access cards in a drawer, cabinet, or other easily accessible location. This practice creates security risks, potentially leading to unauthorized access and increased liability for property owners.

On the other hand, 33% store fobs or access cards in an electronic key control system for an added layer of security. These findings are consistent with our 2022 survey, indicating little change in how properties store fobs and access cards.



Insight #7: Most Properties With Traditional Keys Don't Have Plans to Implement Smart Locks

When does your property plan to implement smart locks?

Response	2022 n=87	2024 n=90
Within 6 months	2%	0%
Within 1-5 years	11%	9%
We don't have plans to implement smart locks	67%	81%
We plan to implement smart locks at an unknown date in the future	1%	2%
Don't know/refused	18%	8%

When we asked respondents who still use traditional keys about their plans to implement smart locks, 81% said they don't have any, up from 67% in 2022. Only 9% said within the next one to five years, down from 11%. This data suggests that, for many properties, the perceived benefits of smart locks might not yet be compelling enough.

“

It would be a **massive expenditure of energy** to transition to a different method of entry. Due to retrofitting needs and the organization efforts of our residents, it's not deemed worth the expenditure at this time.”

“

I think smart locks can be useful at certain communities, but I don't see the benefit of transitioning our old units. They **do the same job as traditional keys.**”

The Future of Access Control: Balancing Smart Locks and Traditional Keys

When deciding whether smart locks or traditional keys are the better fit for your multifamily community, it's important to remember the primary goals of access control: security and efficiency.

While not everyone considers smart locks more secure, and issues with dead batteries remain, operational benefits like easier rekeying and managing resident lockouts can make smart technology appealing.

Despite the shift toward smart technology, traditional key control systems are still relevant, especially for properties wanting to balance innovation with security and practicality.

If you or your staff don't have a strong preference between smart locks and traditional locks, be cautious that this perspective doesn't lead to complacency about resident security.

No matter what kind of locks your community uses, the following best practices apply:

- **Have a plan to deal with operational challenges, whether it's dealing with dead batteries in smart locks or replacing lost keys.**
- **Train your staff and end users.**
- **Secure keys and fobs in an electronic key control system to prevent unauthorized access and log each transaction for a complete audit trail.**

To see how KeyTrak systems can help you keep keys secure while improving your property's efficiency, visit keytrak.com/multifamily.

¹ [Parks Associates](#)

² [NMHC via Multi-Housing News](#)



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