First-Week Keys-in-Hand Checklist

Stage: Owning It · **Author:** Gustav Emilio *(pen name; no professional credentials claimed)* **Sources checked:** 23 November 2026 · **For:** Your first seven days as sole owner

> **Note:** General information, not financial, legal, or home-safety advice. Follow local fire/building codes and manufacturer instructions for all safety equipment.

Day 1 — Locks, Shutoffs & First Walkthrough

- ☐ **Rekey or replace exterior door locks** (and reset smart lock PINs, Wi-Fi locks, and garage-door keypad codes)
- ☐ **Locate and tag your main shutoffs:** main water shutoff valve, water heater shutoff, natural gas shutoff (if equipped), and main electrical panel
- ☐ **Verify breaker labels** with a lamp or outlet tester while the house is empty
- ☐ **Take meter readings** (electric, gas, water) and photo-document baseline condition before boxes arrive

Days 1–2 — Smoke & Carbon Monoxide Alarms

- ☐ **Smoke alarms:** confirm working alarms **inside every bedroom, outside each separate sleeping area, and on every level including the basement** (U.S. Fire Administration) [1]
- ☐ **Check alarm age & batteries:** USFA recommends testing monthly, replacing 9-volt batteries annually, and replacing entire smoke alarms every **10 years** from manufacture date [1]
- ☐ **Carbon monoxide (CO) alarms:** confirm battery-operated or battery-backed CO alarms **on every level of the home and outside each separate sleeping area** (CPSC) [2]

Days 2–3 — Paperwork Vault, Tax Basis & Junk-Mail Defence

Store your full closing packet in a fire-resistant box and encrypted digital backup. The CFPB highlights **four core records** to confirm you have (CFPB After Closing) [3]:

- ☐ **Closing Disclosure** (final 5-page loan & fee statement — needed for tax filing and future refinancing) [3]
- ☐ **Promissory Note** (your signed promise to repay the loan) [3]
- ☐ **Mortgage / Security Instrument / Deed of Trust** [3]
- ☐ **Deed** (plus title insurance policy and inspection/repair reports) [3]
- ☐ **Start a "home cost-basis" folder:** save your Closing Disclosure and receipts for permanent capital improvements — under IRS rules, capital improvements (unlike routine repairs) can add to your cost basis if you later sell (IRS Pub 530, IRS Pub 523) [4][5]
- ☐ **Filter post-closing junk mail:** Because your deed, lender, loan amount, and address become public record after closing, mailers often copy your lender's name and closing date with "urgent" language and fine-print disclaimers — check directly with your servicer or county office before paying any solicitation [3]

Days 3–5 — Utilities, Escrow & Servicer Protection

- ☐ **Transfer utilities into your name** (electric, gas, water, sewer, trash/recycling, internet) and confirm first billing dates
- ☐ **Confirm your first mortgage due date & payment portal**
- ☐ **Check your escrow setup:** confirm whether property taxes and homeowners insurance are collected monthly into escrow; if any tax or insurance bill is *not* escrowed, calendar its due dates immediately to avoid penalties or expensive lender force-placed insurance (CFPB) [6]

- ☐ **Know your servicer-transfer protections:** your loan's servicing rights can be transferred; your old servicer generally must notify you at least **15 days before** transfer (and new servicer within **15 days after**), and for **60 days** after transfer the new servicer cannot charge a late fee if you sent an on-time payment to the previous servicer (CFPB) [7]
- ☐ **Verify any post-closing wire request by phone** using a previously confirmed number — closing wire scams can target final escrow/tax adjustments too (CFPB) [8]

Days 5–7 — Solo Owner Backup Plan

- ☐ **Place a spare key with one trusted local contact** (plus share your shutoff-valve locations for emergencies)
- ☐ **Save 24-hour emergency trades** in your phone & on paper (plumber, electrician, HVAC, locksmith, water/gas utility emergency lines)
- ☐ **Update address** (USPS forwarding, employer/payroll, banks, insurance, driver's license, voter registration)
- ☐ **Set recurring calendar reminders:** monthly smoke/CO alarm test, HVAC filter check, annual escrow review

Sources *(All checked 23 November 2026)*

1. U.S. Fire Administration (FEMA), *Smoke Alarms*. https://www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/home-fires/prepare-for-fire/smoke-alarms/
2. U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), *CO Alarms*. https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Education-Centers/Carbon-Monoxide-Information-Center/CO-Alarms
3. CFPB, *After closing*. https://www.consumerfinance.gov/owning-a-home/close/after-closing/
4. IRS, *Publication 530 (2025), Tax Information for Homeowners*. https://www.irs.gov/publications/p530
5. IRS, *Publication 523 (2025), Selling Your Home*. https://www.irs.gov/publications/p523
6. CFPB, *What is an escrow or impound account?* https://www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/what-costs-will-i-have-to-pay-as-part-of-taking-out-a-mortgage-loan-en-140/
7. CFPB, *What happens if the company that I send my mortgage payments to changes?* https://www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/what-happens-if-the-company-that-i-send-my-mortgage-payments-to-changes-en-215/
8. CFPB, *The essential steps to close on your home with confidence* (archived blog). https://www.consumerfinance.gov/archive/blog/essential-steps-close-your-home-confidence/