

Leaning Brick Mailbox Repair: Why It Happens and the Texas Fix That Holds

Soil, Footings, and Straightening a Mailbox So It Stays
Straight

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Chapter 1: Leaning Brick Mailbox Repair

Starts Underground

Every year I get the same call, sometimes the same week, from three different neighborhoods: "My brick mailbox is leaning. Can you straighten it?" And every year I give the same answer, because the truth hasn't changed in fifty years: the lean is not a brick problem. The brick is doing exactly what brick does — holding together in a rigid column. The lean is a ground problem. Something underneath the mailbox moved, and the column went with it.

This book is about leaning brick mailbox repair the way it actually works in Texas — which means it's really a book about soil, footings, and water. I'm going to show you how to read your lean the way I read it: what direction it leans, how fast it's moving, and what the crack pattern tells you about what's happening underground. Then I'll walk through the straightening methods that actually hold in Texas clay — and the ones that don't, including the expensive mistakes I watch homeowners make every year.

Here's the promise and the warning up front. A leaning

mailbox can be fixed, and fixed permanently — but only if the fix addresses the ground. Straighten the column without fixing the ground and you've bought yourself a straighter mailbox for a season or two. The lean comes back, because the ground is still doing what the ground does. Every method in this book is judged by one standard: does it hold in expansive Texas clay? If it doesn't, it's not in this book — or it's in the chapter about what not to do.

Chapter 2: Why Texas Clay Moves Everything It Touches

To fix a leaning mailbox in Texas, you have to understand the ground it's standing on. Most of the Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex sits on Blackland Prairie clay over Eagle Ford Shale — some of the most expansive soil in the country. Documented swelling pressures run above 10,000 pounds per square foot. The clay runs ten to fifteen feet deep in places. And it does something no other soil does at this scale: it breathes.

When it rains, the clay swells — it can gain up to thirty percent of its volume in a wet cycle. When drought hits, it shrinks, opening cracks in the ground you could lose a pocketknife in. This shrink-swell cycle moves everything sitting on it or in it: house foundations, driveways, sidewalks, and yes, brick mailboxes. Industry estimates put the share of Texas buildings affected by clay movement at sixty to eighty percent. Your mailbox is not special. It's just smaller, so the movement shows up faster and more visibly.

Here's what that means in practice. A brick mailbox is a rigid

column — maybe three feet tall, a couple hundred pounds of brick and mortar. It has no flexibility. When the soil under one side swells and the other side doesn't, or when one side settles and the other holds, the column tilts as a single rigid unit. The mortar joints on the tension side crack open. The column leans. And because the column is rigid, even a quarter inch of differential soil movement at the base shows up as a visible lean at the top. A mailbox doesn't need much movement to look drunk.

The critical thing to understand: this is seasonal and progressive. The mailbox leans a little more every wet-dry cycle. It rarely leans all at once — that would be impact damage, which is a different book. The clay lean is slow, steady, and directional. Which brings us to reading it.

Chapter 3: Reading the Lean — What Direction and Speed Tell You

Before you spend a dollar, read the lean. The direction it leans, the speed it's moving, and the crack pattern tell you what's happening underground — and they tell a good mason which fix to recommend before he ever picks up a shovel.

Direction. Stand back and sight the column. Which way does it lean? Now look at what's on that side. Nine times out of ten, the lean points at the water or away from the support. The most common pattern I see: the mailbox leans toward the street. Why? Because the street side gets the runoff — water sheets off the road and the curb, saturates the soil on the street side, the clay swells there, and the column gets pushed. Or the reverse: the yard side stays wet from sprinklers, the street side dries out, and the column leans toward the dry side as the wet side lifts. Either way, the lean follows the moisture. Find the water, find the cause.

Speed. Is this a lean that appeared over years, or months? Slow lean — a degree or two over several years — is classic clay cycling on a marginal footing. Fast lean — noticeably

worse in a single season — means something changed: a new water source (redirected drainage, a broken sprinkler head, a neighbor's new grading), erosion washing soil out from under one side, or a footing that's finally given up. Fast lean deserves urgency. Slow lean deserves a plan.

The crack pattern. Look at the mortar joints. On a leaning column, the joints open up on the tension side — the side the lean is pulling away from — in a fan pattern, wider at the top of the lean side. If the cracks are in the joints only, the column is tilting as a unit and the brick is intact. If cracks run through bricks, something more violent happened — impact, or severe differential movement — and straightening gets more complicated. Even, all-around joint deterioration with no directional pattern isn't a lean problem at all — that's age, and it's a repointing job, not a straightening job.

The plumb check. Hold a level against each face of the column, or hang a plumb bob from the cap. Measure how far out of plumb the top is, in inches. Write it down with the date. Check again in a month, and after the next big rain. A lean that's stable — same measurement month after month — is a candidate for straightening. A lean that's actively moving is telling you the ground hasn't finished with it, and

the fix has to be bigger.

This is the diagnosis. Five minutes, a level, your eyes. It determines everything that follows.

Chapter 4: The Footing Autopsy — Digging Up the Truth

Every leaning mailbox has a footing story, and the story is underground. Before any straightening method gets chosen, somebody has to look at the footing. Here's how.

Get a shovel and dig down alongside the base of the column — carefully, on the side away from the lean first so you don't undermine it further. What you're looking for:

A proper footing is a concrete pad wider than the column — typically extending several inches beyond the brick on all sides — poured deep enough to get below the worst of the seasonal moisture swing, with the column bonded to it. If you find this, intact and level, the lean is a soil problem acting on a good footing — erosion, water concentration, or extreme clay movement overwhelming even good construction. The fix works with the footing.

A marginal footing is the most common thing I find: a thin slab, maybe three or four inches of concrete, sometimes unreinforced, poured shallow. It was fine when the soil was stable. Then a wet year came, the clay moved, and the thin

slab cracked or tilted. The footing exists but it wasn't enough for Texas clay. The fix usually means supplementing or replacing it.

No footing is depressingly common on older and builder-grade mailboxes: brick laid on grade, or on a shovelful of mortar, or on a couple of inches of dry-pack that crumbled years ago. The column has been sitting on dirt, riding every soil cycle directly. No straightening method fixes this — there's nothing to straighten against. This mailbox needs a rebuild on a real footing. Anybody who quotes you a straightening price without digging first is quoting blind.

A broken footing — cracked slab, separated sections, rebar rusted through — means the footing failed structurally. Sometimes you can underpin it. Sometimes it's a rebuild. Depends on how bad and where.

Dig on two sides if you can. The footing's condition on the lean side versus the stable side tells you the failure mode. And photograph everything — if this becomes an insurance or HOA conversation, the photos are evidence.

Chapter 5: The Five Ways a Texas Mailbox Leans

In fifty years I've seen every cause, but they sort into five patterns. Knowing which one you have determines the fix.

1. The shallow footing. The most common. Builder poured a thin slab or nothing at all, clay cycled for a decade, column tilted. The lean is slow, progressive, and usually toward the street or the wet side. Fix: depends on severity — underpinning or rebuild.

2. Water concentration. Something changed the drainage: a neighbor regraded, a downspout got redirected, a sprinkler head broke and now soaks one side of the mailbox daily, the street was resurfaced and now sheds water differently. One side of the soil stays wet, the clay there swells, the column leans away from the wet side — or the wet side erodes and the column leans toward it. The lean is often faster than the clay-cycle pattern. Fix: correct the water first, then address the lean. Straightening without fixing the water is painting a sinking ship.

3. Erosion. Soil washing out from under one side of the

footing — common where the mailbox sits near a drainage swale, a curb with heavy gutter flow, or a slope. You'll see it: soil pulled away from the base on one side, maybe a visible void under the footing edge. The column leans toward the eroded side. Fix: restore the soil, armor against future erosion, then re-level or underpin.

4. Tree roots. A tree near the mailbox — and in Texas suburbs, there's always a tree near the mailbox — sends roots under the footing. Roots grow, they lift one side, or they suck moisture from one side unevenly and the clay shrinks differentially. The lean is slow and often accompanied by root evidence when you dig. Fix: root management plus footing work. Cutting the roots without addressing the footing just resets the clock.

5. Impact. Somebody clipped it — car, mower, delivery truck — not hard enough to knock it down, hard enough to shift it on its footing. The lean appears suddenly, the crack pattern may run through bricks, and the history usually includes a sheepish neighbor or a scuff mark on the brick. Fix: this is structural damage, not soil movement. The column almost always needs to come down to the damage and go back up.

Notice what's not on the list: "the bricks are bad" and "the

mortar failed." Brick and mortar don't cause lean. They reveal it.

Chapter 6: Measuring the Lean — When It's a Fix and When It's a Rebuild

Not every lean is straightenable. Here's how I draw the line.

Straightenable: The column is intact — brick sound, no through-brick cracking. The lean is moderate — the top is out of plumb by a few inches, not a foot. The footing exists and is mostly sound, even if it's tilted or undermined on one side. The cause is identified and correctable — water, erosion, shallow footing with good soil beneath. The lean is stable or slow-moving. In these cases, the column is a good rigid unit sitting on a fixable foundation problem, and the economics favor saving it.

Rebuild: The column is damaged — through-brick cracks, crushed courses, impact damage. The lean is severe — the top is a foot or more out, or the column is visibly twisting. There is no footing, or the footing is destroyed. The cause can't be corrected — the mailbox sits in a drainage path that can't be rerouted, or the soil is so active that no shallow fix will hold. The lean is fast and progressive despite correction attempts. In these cases, straightening is throwing good money at a

structure that can't be saved, and the honest recommendation is a rebuild on a proper deep footing.

The gray zone: Moderate lean, marginal footing, correctable cause. This is where judgment lives, and where you want a mason who's seen a hundred of these, not one who's seen three. The question is always: will the fix hold for ten years in this soil? If yes, straighten. If the mason can't say yes with a straight face, rebuild.

One more consideration: cost ratio. If the straightening fix costs seventy percent of a rebuild and the rebuild lasts three times longer, the rebuild is the better buy. I'll put real numbers on this in Chapter 12.

Chapter 7: Straightening Method 1 — Excavate, Lift, and Re-Level

For a moderate lean on a sound footing, the simplest fix is also the oldest: dig it out, lift it straight, and lock it in.

Here's how it works. The mason excavates around the footing on the lean side — carefully, without undermining the stable side. Using jacks, levers, or cribbing, the column and footing are eased back to plumb — slowly, because brick columns don't like sudden moves. Once plumb, the void under the lifted side is filled with compacted structural fill or flowable concrete, the footing is extended or thickened if it was marginal, and everything is backfilled in compacted lifts.

When it works: The footing is sound but tilted or undermined. The lean is moderate. The soil beneath is stable once you get past the problem zone. The cause — erosion, a water issue — has been corrected.

When it doesn't: The footing is cracked or too thin to lift as a unit — it'll break apart under the jacks. The soil below is the problem, not just the soil beside it — lifting onto the same active clay just resets the cycle. The lean is severe enough

that lifting stresses the column beyond what the mortar can take.

What it costs: This is a half-day to a full day's work for a skilled mason with a helper — excavation, lifting, forming, concrete, backfill, and repointing the joints that opened during the move. Typical range: \$400 to \$900, depending on how deep the excavation goes, how much concrete work is involved, and how much repointing the column needs afterward. The "depends on" is the digging — easy sandy soil is one price, Texas clay with roots is another.

The critical detail: The backfill. A lifted footing sitting on loose backfill will settle right back down. The fill under and around the footing has to be compacted in lifts — thin layers, tamped hard — or placed as flowable fill that hardens into solid support. This is where cheap versions of this fix fail. Ask the mason how he's compacting. "I'll tamp it good" is not a method. Lifts and a plate compactor is a method.

Chapter 8: Straightening Method 2 — Underpinning the Low Side

When the footing is sound but one side has settled — the soil beneath it compressed or washed out — underpinning extends the foundation down to stable support on the settled side.

The mason excavates beneath the footing on the low side in sections — never all at once, because you don't undermine the whole column — and pours concrete piers or pads down to stable soil, tying them into the existing footing with rebar dowels. The column's load transfers onto the new deeper support. Done in sections around the perimeter, the footing ends up sitting on a combination of its original pad and new deep piers.

When it works: The footing is intact and worth saving. The settlement is localized — one side, one corner. Stable soil exists within a few feet down. The column above is sound.

When it doesn't: The footing is cracked through — underpinning a broken footing just gives you a well-supported broken footing. The settlement is general, not

localized — the whole area is moving, and spot piers won't fix a regional problem. Access is impossible — utilities, irrigation, or structures block the excavation.

What it costs: Underpinning is real foundation work, priced accordingly. For a mailbox — a small structure needing two to four underpinning points — typical range: \$800 to \$2,000, depending on depth, access, and how many points. The "depends on" is depth: hitting stable soil at three feet is one price, chasing it to eight feet is another. And here's the honest math I promised: at the top of this range, you're approaching rebuild cost. A \$1,800 underpinning on a twenty-year-old column versus a \$1,200 rebuild on a new deep footing — the rebuild usually wins that comparison. Underpinning earns its keep when the column itself is worth saving: good brick, good condition, HOA-matched, expensive to replicate.

Chapter 9: Straightening Method 3 — Helical Piers

Helical piers — steel shafts with screw-like plates, torqued into the ground until they hit load-bearing strata — are the foundation industry's standard answer to settling structures, and they work on mailboxes too.

For a leaning mailbox, two to four small helical piers go in around the column, brackets tie them to the footing, and the column is stabilized — and in many cases, lifted back toward plumb — on steel that bypasses the active clay entirely and bears on stable soil or shale below. It's the same technology that holds up houses, scaled down.

When it works: The soil is deeply active — the clay runs deep and no shallow footing will ever be stable. The column is worth saving. You want the most permanent fix available short of a rebuild. Helical piers are particularly right for Texas because they go below the active clay zone — the depth where seasonal moisture stops mattering — which is something no concrete pad can do.

When it doesn't: The economics. Helical piers run \$2,100 to

\$3,500 per pier for residential work, and even a small mailbox job needs mobilization — the equipment has to come out. For a mailbox, you're typically looking at \$1,500 to \$3,000 all-in for a two-pier stabilization, depending on depth and access. That's rebuild money or more. The engineering is sound; the math is brutal.

The honest verdict: Helical piers are the best technical fix and usually the worst economic fix for a mailbox. They make sense in exactly one scenario: an expensive custom mailbox — elaborate design, costly brick, HOA-mandated style — where rebuilding costs more than the piers. For a standard builder-grade column, the pier quote will exceed the rebuild quote, and the rebuild gives you a new column too. I include this method because homeowners ask about it, and because a foundation salesman may propose it. Now you know the math. If someone quotes you piers for a standard mailbox, get a rebuild quote too, and compare.

Chapter 10: Straightening Method 4 — The Rebuild on a Real Footing

Sometimes the Texas fix is admitting the old mailbox can't be saved — and building the new one so this never happens again.

A rebuild for a leaning mailbox isn't just a new column. It's a new foundation designed against the cause of the lean. That means: excavation below the problem — deep enough to get past the failed shallow footing and into stable soil. A reinforced concrete footing — wider than the column, thick enough to stay rigid, steel-reinforced so it can't crack apart the way the old one did. Drainage considered — the new footing goes in with the water problem that caused the lean already corrected. And the column goes up plumb, on a base that will stay plumb.

What it costs: \$800 to \$1,500 for a standard mailbox on a proper deep footing — the same rebuild range from the cost book, but now you understand why the footing is half the job. The "depends on" factors: how deep the excavation has to go to find stable soil, what the old footing leaves behind

(breaking out a failed slab adds labor), and whether drainage correction — regrading, a drain line, redirecting a downspout — is part of the scope.

When it's the right call: No footing or destroyed footing. Severe lean. Impact damage. Deeply active soil where shallow fixes won't hold. Or the cost-ratio test: when straightening costs approach rebuild cost, rebuild.

The twenty-year test: Ask yourself — or ask the mason — "Will this still be plumb in twenty years?" A rebuild on a proper deep footing with the water handled: yes. A straightening on a marginal footing with the water unaddressed: maybe. "Maybe" is not a fix. It's a delay.

Chapter 11: What Never Works — The Expensive Mistakes

I've watched homeowners spend real money on every one of these. None of them hold.

Repointing over a lean. The most common waste. The joints are cracked because the column is tilting. New mortar doesn't stop the tilt. The lean continues, the new mortar cracks, and you've paid \$300 for a season of straight-looking joints. Repointing is maintenance for a sound structure. A leaning structure is not sound.

Pushing it straight. Every year somebody tells me about the neighbor who hooked a chain to his truck and pulled the mailbox upright, then packed dirt around the base. It stands up — until the first rain. The ground that let it lean is still the ground. There's no new support, no corrected cause, no compaction. It's a straight mailbox sitting on the same failure. Sometimes the column cracks during the pull, which turns a straightening job into a rebuild.

Shimming the cap or the insert. Leveling the top without addressing the base. The mailbox still leans; now it just has a

level cap on a leaning column. Cosmetic, and it fools nobody — least of all the HOA.

Mudjacking the mailbox. Polyurethane foam or mudjacking can lift slabs — it's proven technology for flatwork. But a mailbox is a point load on a small footprint, not a slab. Foam under a mailbox footing is a temporary lift on the same active clay, and the foam doesn't address the cause. I've seen it tried. I've seen the lean come back.

The concrete collar. Pouring a ring of concrete around the base of the leaning column — the "boot" fix. It looks like support. It's a collar around a column that's still sitting on a failed footing. The column continues to move inside the collar, or the collar cracks, or both. Real support goes under the footing, not around the column.

Ignoring the water. Every straightening method in Chapters 7 through 9 fails if the water problem that caused the lean is still there. Fix the drainage first. Then fix the mailbox. In that order, always.

Chapter 12: What Each Fix Costs — The Honest Comparison

Let's put the methods side by side with 2026 Texas numbers. Every range is "depends on" — depth, access, soil, and how much repointing the column needs after the move.

Excavate, lift, and re-level: \$400 to \$900. Best value when the footing is sound and the lean is moderate. Half to a full day's work.

Underpinning the low side: \$800 to \$2,000. Justified when the column is worth saving and the settlement is localized. Approaches rebuild cost at the top end.

Helical piers: \$1,500 to \$3,000 for a mailbox-scale job. Best engineering, worst economics for a standard column. Earns its keep only on expensive custom mailboxes.

Full rebuild on a proper footing: \$800 to \$1,500. The permanent fix. The twenty-year answer.

Repointing after straightening: \$150 to \$400, usually needed — straightening opens joints, and they should be repointed once the column is stable. Any straightening bid

that doesn't include or mention post-move repointing is incomplete.

The decision framework: If the column is sound and the footing is sound, lift and re-level — cheapest durable fix. If the footing needs help but the column is worth saving, underpin. If the soil is deeply active and the column is valuable, consider piers — but price the rebuild first. If the footing is gone or the column is damaged, rebuild. And if anyone proposes a fix that doesn't address the ground, that's not a fix — it's a rental.

Chapter 13: When to Fix It — Timing the Work to the Clay Cycle

Clay doesn't move on your schedule. It moves on the rain's schedule. And when you straighten a mailbox matters — not just for convenience, but for whether the fix holds.

The worst time to straighten is the peak of the wet season.

In North Texas, that's typically late spring — April through June — when the clay is fully swollen. Straighten a mailbox at maximum swell and you're leveling against a moving target: when the dry summer comes and the clay shrinks back, the ground drops out from under your fresh work and the lean returns. The mason did everything right and the calendar did him wrong.

The best time is the dry late summer into fall — August through October in most of Texas. The clay has shrunk to its minimum, the ground is at its most stable, and the fix goes in against the soil's resting position. Then the wet season comes and the clay swells back around a properly supported footing instead of pushing a marginal one around. This is also when masons can excavate Texas clay without fighting mud — dry

clay digs hard but clean; wet clay digs like soup and won't compact.

Winter is the second choice, with a caveat. The ground is stable, but fresh concrete and mortar don't like freezing temperatures. A footing poured ahead of a hard freeze needs protection — blankets, enclosures — or the cure is compromised. A good mason watches the forecast and plans the pour between cold snaps. If your job has to happen in January, hire the mason who talks about cold-weather concrete without being asked.

Emergency timing overrides everything. A mailbox that's actively tipping — lean visibly worsening week to week, or leaning far enough to be a hazard — doesn't wait for August. Stabilize it now: brace it, excavate carefully, get it safe. You can do the permanent fix in the right season. A braced mailbox through one wet season beats a collapsed mailbox and a rebuild.

The re-measurement rule. Whatever season you fix it in, take a plumb measurement at completion and again after the first full wet-dry cycle. A fix that holds through one complete Texas year — one full swell and one full shrink — is a fix that holds. That's the real warranty test, and it's worth more than

anything written on paper.

Chapter 14: Keeping It Straight — Water Management After the Fix

The fix holds only if the water behaves. Here's what keeps a straightened or rebuilt mailbox straight.

Grade away. The soil around the mailbox should slope away from the base on all sides. Water that ponds against the column saturates the soil unevenly and restarts the cycle. A few minutes with a rake and some topsoil fixes most grading issues.

Redirect the sprinklers. The number one water source I find at leaning mailboxes is a sprinkler head soaking one side daily. Adjust the head, switch to a drip line, or cap it. This is free and it's often the actual cure.

Mind the street. Curb and gutter flow concentrates water at the street side of the mailbox. You can't regrade the street, but you can make sure your side drains — a small swale or channel that carries gutter overflow past the mailbox instead of into its base.

Downspouts and drainage. If a downspout discharges near

the mailbox, extend it past. If the yard drains toward the mailbox, that's a grading project — bigger, but it protects the house foundation too, which is worth far more than the mailbox.

Watch it. After any straightening or rebuild, check the plumb twice a year — spring and fall, when the clay is at its extremes. A level against the column takes ten seconds. Catching new movement early is the difference between a minor correction and another full fix. The mailboxes that stay straight for decades belong to people who look at them.

Chapter 15: The HOA Lean Letter — Dealing With the Notice

In Texas suburbs, the leaning mailbox often announces itself with an HOA violation letter before the homeowner notices the lean. Here's how to handle it.

Don't panic, do respond. The HOA wants the mailbox fixed, not a fight. A written response with a plan and a timeline — "contractor scheduled, work to begin [date], completion expected [date]" — satisfies most HOAs and stops the fine clock. Silence escalates. Communication resolves.

Get the diagnosis before the contractor. Use Chapters 3 and 4. When the mason arrives, you'll know whether his recommendation matches reality. HOA pressure makes homeowners accept the first available bid — which is how \$400 straightenings get sold for leaning columns that need \$1,200 rebuilds.

Document the cause. If the lean came from something outside your control — street drainage changes, a neighbor's regrading, city work — document it with photos and dates. It doesn't always change the HOA's demand, but it matters for

insurance and for any conversation with the responsible party.

The timeline negotiation. A proper fix — especially a rebuild with footing cure time — takes days to weeks. Most HOAs will grant a reasonable extension with a contractor's schedule in writing. Ask before the deadline passes, not after.

Chapter 16: When the Lean Means Something Bigger

Sometimes the mailbox is the canary. If your mailbox is leaning and your house is showing signs too — stair-step cracks in the brick veneer, doors sticking, gaps at the windows — the mailbox lean and the house movement may share a cause: the same clay, the same water, the same season.

This doesn't mean the mailbox caused anything or that the house is in danger. It means the ground is moving across your property, and the mailbox — small, rigid, shallowly founded — showed it first. The house, with its deeper foundation, shows it later and more seriously.

What to do: Get the house checked. A foundation professional — not a salesperson, a professional — can tell you whether the house movement is seasonal and normal or progressive and structural. In Texas, some seasonal movement is normal on clay; the question is always whether it's stabilizing or advancing. My foundation company deals with exactly this — [foundation movement in Texas clay]

(<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) is the whole business — and the evaluation is the step that separates "watch it" from "fix it."

The order of operations: House first, mailbox second. There's no point perfectly straightening a mailbox while the ground under the house is still moving — and a foundation repair may change the drainage and soil conditions around the mailbox anyway. Fix the big structure, then the small one.

Chapter 17: Hiring Right — Straightening Work in North Texas

Straightening is foundation work wearing a masonry hat. Hire accordingly.

Get three bids, and make sure the bidders are diagnosing, not just pricing. The right contractor digs — or at minimum, probes — before recommending a method. Anyone who quotes a straightening price from the curb, without looking at the footing, is guessing. The diagnosis is the job; the method follows from it.

Ask every bidder: What caused the lean? What's the footing condition? Which method are you recommending, and why not the others? How are you addressing the water? What's compacted, and how? What's the warranty — and does it cover re-lean, or just workmanship?

The warranty question matters more here than in any other masonry work, because the ground is the variable. A straightening warranty should say what happens if the lean returns — not just "our work is guaranteed," but what the remedy is. Get it in writing.

Hire somebody who works in your soil. Texas clay is its own discipline. A contractor who's spent his career on stable soil will under-build for clay every time — shallower footings, less compaction, no drainage thinking. Local experience isn't a nice-to-have on this job. It's the job.

If you're in the Fort Worth–Dallas area and want a straight diagnosis on a [mailbox and masonry repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — lean, footing, the whole picture — that's what we do. And if you want to keep learning before you call anybody, my [free brick repair books](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>) cover the rest of what your masonry is trying to tell you, including the cost side of every fix in this book.

The ground moves. That's Texas. The fix holds when it respects the ground instead of fighting it.

Chapter 18: Questions Homeowners Ask Me

How long does a straightening last? Done right — cause addressed, footing sound or rebuilt, water managed — decades. Done wrong — column pushed upright on the same failed ground — a season or two. The lifespan is in the ground work, not the straightening.

Can I straighten it myself? A slight lean on a sound footing, with excavation and careful lifting — a skilled homeowner can do it, the way a skilled homeowner can do any careful structural work. But the risks are real: cracking the column during the lift, undermining the footing during excavation, or backfilling loose and watching it settle again. And you can't compact like a pro without the equipment. My honest advice: diagnose it yourself using this book, then hire the lift.

The mailbox leans a little every summer and straightens in winter. Is that normal? That's the clay cycle — swelling in the wet season, shrinking in the dry. A small seasonal rock is common on marginal footings. It's telling you the footing is marginal. It won't get better on its own, and the rocking works the mortar joints loose over time. Plan the fix; don't

wait for the lean to become permanent.

My neighbor's mailbox is straight and mine leans. Same street, same soil. Why? Footings differ, water differs, and construction quality differs. His builder poured a real footing; yours didn't. His sprinklers miss the mailbox; yours soak it. His side of the street drains; yours ponds. Same soil, different conditions — the soil is only half the story.

Will the lean damage the mail delivery? A moderate lean doesn't stop delivery. A severe lean — box tilted enough that the door won't stay shut or the carrier can't reach comfortably — can get you a notice from the post office. And a lean that's progressing will get there eventually. Fix it on your schedule, not the post office's.

Should I just rebuild instead of straightening? Run the numbers from Chapter 12 and apply the twenty-year test from Chapter 10. If straightening costs more than half the rebuild and the column is ordinary, rebuild. If the column is special — matched brick, custom design, HOA-mandated — and the footing is saveable, straighten. There's no universal answer; there's your mailbox, your soil, and your math.

Does insurance cover straightening? Rarely. Insurance

covers sudden damage — the car hit it, the tree fell on it. Gradual soil movement is maintenance and earth movement, which policies exclude. If impact caused the lean, file. If clay caused it, that's ownership.

The mason wants to straighten it in May, at the peak of the wet season. Should I wait? If the mailbox is stable — lean not worsening, no hazard — waiting for the dry late summer gives the fix its best chance, and a good mason will tell you that himself. If it's actively moving or unsafe, don't wait: brace it now, do the permanent fix in the right season. A mason who insists on a full straightening at maximum swell, with no mention of the clay cycle, is either inexperienced with Texas soil or just wants the job on his schedule instead of yours.

A Final Word Before You Call

Your mailbox leaned for a reason, and the reason is underground. That's the whole book in one sentence.

Dig before you decide. Fix the water before you fix the column. Choose the method that respects the clay instead of ignoring it. And judge every bid by the twenty-year test: will this still be plumb in twenty years?

The ground moves. That's Texas. Build like you know it.

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/>).