



Preventing Frozen Pipes

If you're a winter enthusiast, you're not too happy with the weather so far this winter. We've had a couple of minor snowfalls and no real stretch of cold weather. But give it time, the dog days of winter are still ahead of us, and it's a good time to plan for that extreme weather we're sure to get soon enough.

When temperatures drop, the Fire Department responds to numerous calls for frozen pipes, not only in residential properties, but in commercial properties as well. It creates a huge inconvenience. An average of a quarter million homes sustains some type of water damage each winter. Lives are disrupted and property is damaged, all because of frozen pipes.

Both plastic (PVC) and copper piping can burst, so it doesn't matter what type of plumbing you have. An eighth-inch crack in a pipe can dump over 250 gallons of water into your home each day, destroying furniture, floors, personal property, and valuables.

Now is the time to prevent pipes from freezing before the cold hits by following these important tips:

- The first thing to do is to show everyone who lives in the house where the master water shut off valve is located and how to open and close it in an emergency.
- Insulate pipes in crawl spaces and attics. They are most susceptible to freezing. The more insulation, the better protected your pipes will be.
- Heat tape or thermostatically-controlled heat cables can be used to wrap pipes. Use only products approved by an independent testing organization, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL) and only for the use intended (indoor or outdoor). Closely follow manufacturer's installation and operation instructions.
- Seal leaks that allow cold air inside, especially near the location of pipes. Look for air leaks around electrical wiring, dryer vents, and pipes. Use caulk or insulation to keep cold air out and the heat in. With severe cold temperatures, even a tiny opening can let enough cold air inside to cause a pipe to freeze.
- Disconnect garden hoses and, if possible, shut the water valve off and drain the line on the inside of the home.

- When the temperatures drop, a trickle of water might be all it takes to keep your pipes from freezing. Let warm water drip through the night, especially if the faucet is on an outside wall. You can open your cabinet doors to allow the warm air to circulate inside. Lift toilet seats to do the same.
- If you're planning on being away from home on vacation or for a few days during a cold stretch, set your thermostat no lower than 55 degrees. Ask a neighbor or friend to check on your house daily to be sure it's warm enough. Or you may shut off the water altogether and drain the lines until you return home.
- If you turn on a faucet and nothing comes out, leave it on and call a plumber immediately! DO NOT try to thaw the pipes with a torch or other open flame. You can try to thaw the pipe by using the warm air from a hair dryer, and start by warming the pipe near the faucet. Water damage is better than having fire damage! Do not use any electrical appliance in areas of standing water because electrocution is possible.

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