

Winterization of Your Home

(See Guidelines for an Extended Absence in Last Section)

Even though you can never anticipate how severe winter might be, there are some steps you can take now to avoid problems this winter.

1. **Don't wait for an emergency.** Always know how to shut off the water supply to your entire house, or parts of it. Knowing the location of a simple shut-off valve could save thousands of dollars in damage. Place a tag on or near the valve to identify its use. Everyone in your house should know where the valves are located and the direction they need to be turned to stop the flow. Remember, when an emergency arises, the first rule is to stop the flow of water before it can do serious damage to your residence and/or business, as well as your belongings.
 - **The main shut-off valve** is usually found on the inside of your house where the water comes in for the water meter. Commonly this would be in the basement, garage or crawl space just inside the foundation wall closest to the street. The valve is either a ball valve, which has a solid handle or a gate valve which looks like a wheel. Putting a few drops of household oil on the handle threads annually will help keep it from corroding and to assure it will turn in case of an emergency.



- **Most fixtures** such as water heaters, dishwashers, sinks and toilets, have individual shut-off valves on the water lines leading to a fixture. If a problem occurs, you can turn the water supply off and still have water to the rest of the house.



2. **Contact a plumber now.** Do you have a favorite local plumber? Are they equipped and ready to handle frozen pipe emergencies? Give them a call to confirm they can help out should you need them, and also call around to a few other local plumbers just as a backup. Keep the phone numbers in a handy place.



3. **Disconnect and drain outdoor hoses.** Disconnecting the hose allows water to drain from the supply line, preventing an overnight freeze from bursting either the faucet or the supply line piping. Turn off the water supply line to the spigot inside the house, if one is available, and drain the plumbing to the exterior.



4. **Cover air vents.** Be sure to close or cover the air vents located in the foundation wall of your home. This will help prevent the pipes in the crawl spaces from being exposed to freezing air. Avoid plugging air vents that your furnace or water heater need for safe operation.



5. **Seal off access doors, air vents and cracks.** Repair broken windows, seal doors and windows to prevent cold winter winds from penetrating your home.



6. **Opening cabinet doors** will allow heat to get to un-insulated pipes under sinks and appliances near exterior walls.



7. **Insulate pipes or faucets in unheated areas.** Pipes that tend to be most susceptible to freezing are those found in the outer walls, in crawl spaces, the attic, or the garage. Exposed pipes should be insulated with items such as pipe wrap, heat tape, and foam jackets. These types of insulating products are available at local building supply stores or hardware stores. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully to install these products. An alternative to tape or cable is wrapping pipes with several layers of newspaper. If you still have questions, call a plumber for help.



- 8. Protect the water meter from freezing.** The bottom of the water meter is designed to break if the meter freezes, thus minimizing the damage to the meter and other plumbing. Shield the meter from drafts and cold weather with cardboard, insulation or heat tape.



- 9. Temporary patch kit.** Many hardware and home improvement stores sell emergency patch kits that allow you to temporarily seal off burst pipes as you wait for a permanent repair. Keep one kit handy for an emergency.



- 10. If your pipes freeze don't take chances.** If you turn on your faucets and nothing comes out, leave the faucets turned on and call a plumber. If you detect that your water pipes have frozen and burst, turn off the water at the main shut-off valve in the house; leave the water faucets turned on.



11. **Have had problems before?** Leave the water dripping. Although that sounds wasteful, allow a small trickle of cold water to run from the highest faucet in your home. This trickle should be the size of a pencil point. The cost of the water is much less than that of a burst pipe.



- **CAUTION: Never try to thaw a pipe with a torch or other open flame.** Even the most cautious homeowner may sooner or later experience a frozen pipe. If this happens to you, don't panic. A freeze up at an exposed pipe or under a sink generally can be eliminated by applying heat with a hair dryer,



heat lamp or even an incandescent light bulb (LED and CFL bulbs will not work). Light bulbs should always be protected by a cage (trouble light type) and not to be placed near flammable materials. Start by warming the pipe as close to the faucet as possible, working toward the coldest section of pipe. Some homeowners have been known to use a flame or gas torch when thawing pipes. Although this may seem to be a reasonable approach, it is one of the most dangerous. Attempting to thaw a line too rapidly with extreme heat could result in an explosion and may cause injury. Water damage is preferable to burning down your house.

Guidelines for an Extended Absence

1. **Winterize your vacant house.** If you leave your house for an extended period, take the following steps to help protect pipes from freezing:
 - Turn off main shut-off valve. Be aware that if you have a fire protection sprinkler system in your house, it will be deactivated when you shut off the water.
 - Turn off water heater. (If you drain your hot water heater make sure that you also turn off the electricity or gas source to this unit.)
 - Open indoor and outdoor faucets to drain pipes.
 - Drain toilets by holding down the lever until the tank empties and pour biodegradable antifreeze into sinks and toilets. Biodegradable anti-freeze is what is used to winterize RV's and is available anywhere that sells RV supplies.
 - Leave your heat on at a minimum temperature of 55 degrees to help keep pipes from freezing in interior walls, especially around the water meter & main shut off valve.
 - Ask a neighbor or friend to check your house daily during cold spells.
 - Call the Water Department to turn off the water at the street & remove the water meter.
 - Call your plumber for additional assistance on winterizing your home.
2. **Contact the Water Department.** If you are leaving the house for extended periods, the Water Department will come and turn the water supply off at the property line and remove the water meter to prevent it from being damaged in the event the temperatures drop below freezing. If you plan to have the Department turn off your water supply, please let them know as soon as possible so they can locate and uncover the valve box while the weather is good. Waiting until the ground is frozen or the valve box is buried under a snow bank makes the job infinitely harder.

