

Preventing Frozen Pipes

Frozen pipes are not just an inconvenience. An average of a quarter-million homes are damaged and lives are disrupted each winter because of frozen water pipes.

An eighth-inch crack in a pipe can spew up to 250 gallons of water a day, destroying floors, furniture, and personal property. Both plastic (PVC) and copper pipes can burst.

Before the cold hits:

- **INSULATE** pipes in crawl spaces and attics, the ones most susceptible to freezing. Remember: 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 Laboratories, and only for the use intended (exterior or interior). Closely follow all manufacturer's installation and operating 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 heat in. With severe wind chill, a tiny opening can let enough cold air inside to cause a pipe to freeze.
- **DISCONNECT** garden hoses and, if practical, use an indoor valve to shut off and drain water from pipes leading to outside faucets. This reduces the chance of freezing in the short span of the pipe just inside the house.

When the mercury drops:

- **A TRICKLE** of water might be all it takes to keep your pipes from freezing. Let warm water drip overnight, preferably from a faucet on an outside wall.
- **OPEN** cabinet doors to allow heat to get to uninsulated pipes under sinks and appliances near exterior walls.

If you are away:

- **SET** the thermostat no lower than 55 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **ASK** a friend or neighbor to check your house daily to make sure it's warm enough to prevent freezing, or...
- **SHUT OFF** and drain the water system. Be aware that if you have a fire protection sprinkler system in your house, it will be deactivated when you shut off the water.

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 your water pipes have frozen, turn off the water at the main shut-off valve in the house; leave the water faucets turned on and call a plumber.
- **NEVER** try to thaw a pipe with a torch or other open flame. Water damage is preferable to fire damage. You may be able to thaw a frozen pipe with the warm air from a hair dryer. Start by warming the pipe as close to the faucet as possible, working toward the coldest section of pipe.
- **DO NOT** use electrical appliances in areas of standing water because electrocution is possible.