

Don't Let the Expense & Inconvenience of Frozen Pipes Give You A "Chill."

Each winter, many homeowners face the expense and inconvenience of frozen water pipes. By taking a few simple precautions, you can cross that off your list of worries.

1. Disconnect & drain outdoor hoses

-Detaching the hose allows water to drain from the pipe. Otherwise, a single hard, overnight freeze can burst either the faucet or the pipe it's connected to.

2. Insulate pipes or faucets in un-heated areas

-If you have pipelines in an unheated garage or cold crawl space under the house, wrap the water pipes before temperatures decline. Hardware or building supply stores will have good pipe wrapping materials available.

3. Seal off access doors, air vents & cracks

-Repair broken basement windows. Winter winds whistling through overlooked openings can quickly freeze exposed water pipes. But don't plug air vents your furnace or water heater needs for good combustion.

4. Find the master shut-off valve

-It may be near the water heater or the washing machine. More likely it's where the water line comes in from the street. If a pipe bursts anywhere in the house - kitchen, bath, basement, crawl space - this valve turns it off. So find it now and paint it a bright color or hang a tag on it. Be sure everyone in the family knows where it is and what it does.

5. Leave a pencil-lead-thin stream of water flowing.

-A small flow of water running from a bathroom or kitchen faucet during the worst of the cold spell can help prevent faucets or water service lines from freezing. You can also leave your cabinet doors open to allow the heat of the house to help keep your pipes from freezing. When away from home for several days, turn the water off and drain the outside faucets or leave the heating system inside your home on to keep the pipes warm.

What if you wake up one day to find the pipes are frozen despite your precautions?

-During an extended cold spell, it could happen despite precautions.

-Do you have the plumber's telephone number handy? Write it down before you need it in an emergency.

-If you think you know where the freeze up occurred and want to try thawing it yourself, do NOT under any circumstances use a torch with an open flame! The house could catch fire. Also, overheating a single spot can burst the pipe. Heating a soldered joint could allow it to leak or come completely apart.

-The easiest tool is a hair dryer with a low heat setting. Wave the warm air back and forth along the spot, not on one spot. If you don't have a hair dryer, you can wrap the pipes with towels and pour hot water over them. It's messy, but it works.

-Be careful because the pipe may already be broken. It's not leaking because the water is frozen, but when you thaw it out, water could come gushing out. Be ready to run for the master shutoff valve if necessary. The main thing is to take precautions before the winter sets in.