

How To Prevent Frozen Pipes this Winter

As winter temperatures begin to creep up around your home, you may begin to get nervous about your water pipes and plumbing. Frozen pipes that burst or break, can cause expensive water damage to your home and property. Even a small tear in a water pipe can send hundreds of gallons of water each minute into your home. Given the fact that many homeowners take time over the winter holidays to travel, it's important to know what preventative measures you can take to winterize your home. Here are some tips for protecting your property.

OUTSIDE YOUR HOME OR BUSINESS

The water service or "lateral" is the pipe that connects a home or business to the City's municipal water supply. Under extended, severe weather conditions, the water pipe in the ground can freeze. Interior piping can also freeze when exposed to extended, cold temperatures in basements, cellars, crawl spaces, and similar locations.

A simple way customers can help to avoid problems with frozen water services is to routinely run water from an interior, cold-water tap for about five minutes, two or three times each day, especially during periods when there is usually little water use. Reduced pressure and/or discolored water may be signs the water service is starting to freeze. If those signs are noticed, run cold water until the pressure and water clarity return to normal. Another preventative action is to run a small, continuous stream of cold water, about the diameter of a pencil, overnight and during extended periods when little or no water use is anticipated.

INSIDE YOUR HOME OR BUSINESS

Interior piping and the water meter inside homes and businesses can freeze and burst if they are not protected. Interior areas must be adequately heated to protect plumbing from freezing. Openings to the outside must be closed and properly insulated to eliminate cold air entry. Similarly, repair broken windows, check doors, and insulate areas where cold air can leak in from the outside.

Be sure to remove hoses from outside faucets and close the valves inside the house that control those faucets, and then open the taps until they run dry.

Meters and interior piping located near outside walls or foundations should be insulated to prevent freezing. You can purchase inexpensive foam pipe covers at the hardware store and wrap pipes or plumbing to prevent heat loss inside the pipes. If insulation will not provide adequate protection, wrap pipes with heat tape or heat cables. These products plug into power outlets and generate heat to prevent freezing. Purchase products that are Underwriter Laboratory (UL) Listed or approved by a similar independent testing agency, and install these items following manufacturers' instructions. Unapproved or improperly installed products can cause fires. Inspect heat tape or cable for wear and replace when necessary.

WHAT TO DO WITH A HOUSE THAT WILL SIT VACANT FOR PART OR ALL OF WINTER

When away from home for a few days, keep the thermostat set at 55 degrees or higher. Have a friend check your house periodically to make sure the heat stays on and there are no water-related or other issues. When extended stays away from home are planned, consider having the water shut-off, the meter removed, and the interior plumbing drained and winterized by a licensed plumber.

HOW TO TELL IF YOUR PIPES ARE FROZEN

The test to tell if your pipes are frozen is simple: just turn on your faucet or flush the toilet. If no water comes out, and it is in the middle of winter, suspect a blockage of ice. Turn off the water at the main valve inside your home immediately (located at the water meter which is typically found in the basement). A hair dryer or portable heater can be used to try to thaw the frozen pipe but stay alert for potential electric shocks if standing water is present. **DO NOT TRY TO THAW A PIPE WITH A TORCH OR OPEN FLAME.** Always call a plumber right away if you aren't sure where the blockage has occurred or if you suspect damage to the pipe.

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

You can help monitor vacant properties in your neighborhood that might be especially susceptible to freezing problems. Contact the La Crosse Utilities Office if you observe or suspect a problem.

City residents are also asked to keep an eye on fire hydrants near their properties and help to make sure the hydrants are clear of snow so that they are accessible to the Fire Department in the event of a fire emergency.

Please contact the La Crosse Utilities Office (608/789-7536) with any questions.