



Every winter, many homeowners face the expense and inconvenience of frozen water pipes.

But, you can cross that off your list of winter worries by taking a few simple precautions.



1 Disconnect and 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 unheated areas.

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

3 Consider installing “heat tape,” “heat cable,” or similar materials

on exposed water pipes. These are relatively easy to install, and hardware or building supply stores have many brands to fit almost any need. Be sure that you use only UL-listed products and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.

4 Seal off access doors, air vents, and cracks.

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

5 Find the master shutoff.

It's most likely where the water line comes into your house from the street. If it's not there, it may

be near the water heater or the washing machine. If a pipe bursts anywhere in the house—kitchen,

bath, basement, or 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 house knows where it is and what it does.



6 Call and check with your water company.

In some parts of the country, outdoor meter boxes or pits are the homeowner's responsibility to keep covered and freeze-proof. Elsewhere, you're not allowed to touch them. In some places you're advised to leave a pencil-thin stream of water flowing from a bathroom faucet during the worst of a cold spell. In other places, you'll be told that's just wasteful.

What if it's too late?

What if you wake up one day to find the pipes are frozen anyway? During an extended cold spell, it could happen despite precautions.

If you think you know where the freeze-up occurred and want to try thawing it out yourself, do not under any circumstances use a torch with an open flame! The whole 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 probably a hair dryer with a low heat setting. Wave the warm air back and forth along the pipe, not on one spot. If you don't have a hair dryer, you can wrap the frozen section with rags or 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.

NORTHWESTERN WATER & SEWER DISTRICT

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cold weather
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