

Preventing Frozen Pipes

What are some common reasons for frozen pipes?

Water pipes will usually be more susceptible to freezing when the outdoor air temperature is below freezing for more than a few days. Special attention should be given when the outdoor air temperature does not rise above zero degrees during the daytime hours. Some reasons include:

1. Unheated basement where the water meter and pipes are located.
2. Un-insulated pipes which are against outside walls.
3. Open windows near water meter or pipes.
4. Openings or cracks which allow cold outside air near the water meter or pipes.
5. Water meter or pipes enclosed or boxed in against outside wall.

How can I prevent my pipes from freezing?

There are many ways to help prevent your water pipes from freezing in extreme weather. Some suggestions include:

1. Keep the pipes exposed to outside walls heated.
2. Provide ventilation to pipes allowing warmer air to circulate around them.
3. Insulate your pipes, especially in areas that are exposed to frequent cold like kitchen or bathroom sinks on exterior walls. You should wrap from the base of the sink to where the pipe enters the wall and in the basement from where the pipe is visible to the meter or service entrance.
4. Caulk and seal any openings near your water pipes.
5. Turn off all outside faucets from the shut off valve and leave the outside valve open. If you don't have shut off valves, you should also wrap those pipes. Sometimes pipes will freeze from those outside faucets into the house.
6. Have a slow trickle stream of water running from a faucet, preferable a faucet near an outside wall. (Moving water is more difficult to freeze; however, this will affect your bill.)

Where are my shutoff valves?

There are actually two major shutoff valves in line with your service. The first valve, called a corporation stop, is generally located at the water main and is buried under the street. The other major valve is located next to the water meter. Other valves may be near plumbing appliances such as sinks and toilets.

What part of my service is my responsibility?

The resident's responsibility for maintenance begins immediately after the corporation stop. This includes the lateral to the homes meter box, and from there, up through the entire home. However, the water meter itself is the property of the Utilities. More importantly, the valve adjacent to the meter is the responsibility of the resident.

Should I maintain my main shutoff valve?

Keeping your main valve in good working condition will assure you that you will be able to turn your water off in the event of an emergency, in case one of your water pipes breaks, for example. Older style gate valves should be turned periodically due to possible corrosion build-up. Newer Teflon coated ball valves should stay in working order without any regular turning.

What if my main valve does not work in an emergency?

Calls should be directed to the Utilities, 608.739.3390 so that someone can shut off your water.

What should I do if my pipes freeze?

If your pipes freeze, there are some procedures that you can follow to thaw them. The quicker the problem is recognized; the better chance that damage will be minimized. Some techniques for thawing frozen pipes include:

1. 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 faucets turned on.
2. If possible, expose a boxed-in area to the inside heat. An example includes opening some ceiling tiles if your home has a drop ceiling.
3. Use a heat gun. However, be extremely careful as the heat from the heat gun will ignite any wood or paper they contact.
4. 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 towards the coldest section of pipe.
5. DO NOT use electrical appliances in areas of standing water because you could be electrocuted.
6. DO NOT use torches to thaw pipes!
7. Rubbing the pipes with warm damp rags may slowly thaw the line.
8. If you do not have water for an extended period of time and have a gas water heater, turn off the gas to your hot water heater.