

# FROZEN PIPES

## Preventing and Thawing Frozen Pipes

### Why pipe freezing is a problem

Water has a unique property in that it expands as it freezes. This expansion puts tremendous pressure on whatever is containing it, including metal or plastic pipes. No matter the "strength" of a container, expanding water can cause pipes to break. Pipes that freeze most frequently are those that are exposed to severe cold, like outdoor hose bibs, swimming pool supply lines, water sprinkler lines, and water supply pipes in unheated interior areas like basements and crawl spaces, attics, garages, or kitchen cabinets. Also, pipes that run against exterior walls that have little or no insulation are also subject to freezing.

### During Cold Weather, Take Preventive Action

- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage.
- Open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. Be sure to move any harmful cleaners and household chemicals up out of the reach of children.
- When the weather is very cold outside, let the cold water drip from the faucet served by exposed pipes. Running water through the pipe - even at a trickle - helps prevent pipes from freezing because the temperature of the water running through it is above freezing.
- Keep the thermostat set to the same temperature both during the day and at night. By temporarily suspending the use of lower nighttime temperatures, you may incur a higher heating bill, but you can prevent a much more costly repair job if pipes freeze and burst.
- If you will be going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home, set to a temperature no lower than 55°F.

### To Thaw Frozen Pipes

If you turn on a faucet and only a trickle comes out, suspect a frozen pipe. Locate the suspected frozen area of the water pipe. Likely places include pipes running against exterior walls or where your water service enters your home through the foundation.

- Keep the faucet open. As you treat the frozen pipe and the frozen area begins to melt, water will begin to flow through the frozen area. Running water through the pipe will help melt more ice in the pipe.
- Apply heat to the section of pipe using an electric heating pad wrapped around the pipe, and electric hair dryer, a portable space heater (kept away from flammable materials), or wrapping pipes with towels soaked in hot water. *Do not use a blowtorch, kerosene or propane heater, charcoal stove, or other open flame device.* A blowtorch can make water in a frozen pipe boil and cause the pipe to explode. All open flames in homes present a serious fire danger, as well as a severe risk of exposure to lethal carbon monoxide.
- Apply heat until full water pressure is restored. If you are unable to locate the frozen area, if the frozen area is not accessible, or if you can not thaw the pipe, call a licensed plumber.
- Check all other faucets in your home to find out if you have additional frozen pipes. If one pipe freezes, others may freeze, too.

**Future Protection**

- Consider relocating exposed pipes to provide increased protection from freezing. Pipes can be relocated by a professional if the home is remodeled.
- Add insulation added to attics, basements, and crawl spaces. Insulation will maintain higher temperatures in these areas.