Tips for Winterizing Your Home’s Plumbing

1. Pipe insulation

Your pipes are more susceptible to freezing damage when temperatures reach 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Pipe insulation provides your first line of defense against cold temperatures and frozen pipes. For pipe winterization, add a thick layer of insulation around your pipes.

Insulate the pipes in all unheated areas, as they are most likely to freeze. A hardware or plumbing supply store should have the insulation and tools you need. Wrap the pipes in insulation tubes, available at plumbing or home improvement supply stores. Information to help with material selection may be found on the internet or advice from the supply store. Measure the outside diameter of your pipes to make sure you purchase the correct size of tube. Take extra care with pipes that have frozen during previous winters or have been repaired in the last 12 months, as these pipes are more susceptible to damage. Wrapping pipes in heat-tape prior to insulating adds an extra layer of protection, but make sure you follow the manufacturer’s instructions when using heat-tape to avoid damage. Before the onset of cold weather, you may also consider:

   - Removing, draining, and storing garden hoses.
   - Closing the inside valves that control the water supply to outside hose attachments (known as bibs)
   - Open the outside hose bibs to allow any water in the line to drain out.

2. Identify and repair exterior cracks

Note any cracks or holes along the outside walls and foundation of your home. Filling holes and cracks with spray foam insulation and caulking can help stop the cold air from coming into contact with your water pipes during extremely cold weather.

3. Seal off crawl space

Homes with ventilated crawl spaces should be sealed against the cold weather. Cover your vents with heavy-duty pieces of cardboard cut to fit the vents, duct taping the cardboard in place. Don’t forget to seal off access to the crawl space. If you have a basement, look for cracked basement windows that could allow cold air to make contact with pipes. Check for worn or missing insulation around garage and utility doors. Reducing the amount of cold air in the area minimizes your pipes’ vulnerability to freezing.

4. Know where home’s water valve is located

   - Make sure you and your family all know how to shut off the water to your home
   - Know where your home’s main water valve is located (this is not the valve located in the water meter box).
   - Make sure there is nothing in the way of your home’s main water valve that will prevent you from easily accessing it if it needs to be turned off
   - Make sure that your home’s main water valve works properly
   - If it does not work properly, please have a licensed plumber repair it
5. Know where home’s sewer cleanout is located
   • Make sure that the cleanout cap is securely fastened to the top of the sewer lateral pipe
   • Insulate any exposed portions of the sewer cleanout pipe in accordance with instructions above.
   • Ensure that the toilet and plumbing fixture are kept exposed to heat from the living areas

6. Keep a dripping faucet

On nights when the temperature is expected to drop below freezing, turn on faucets along the exterior walls to create a small, steady drip. This eliminates pressure that can build between the faucet and an ice blockage, so even if a pipe freezes, it may not burst.

Make sure that the exterior dripping water faucets are channeled away from the exterior walls of your home

Another option is to drain and shut off the water supply (except indoor fire sprinkler systems) if you expect to be away for several days. Have someone check regularly to ensure the heat is still on and things are all fine in weather that is extreme.

7. Keep home or apartment adequately heated while home and away

Make sure the living space in home is adequately heated to help prevent pipes from freezing. Renters should check with respective landlords or property managers to inquire if they require their tenants/occupants to keep their thermostats above a certain level.

8. Open cabinet doors

You can help stop frozen pipes by introducing more heat. Open all sink-based cabinet doors along exterior walls to allow more heat to reach the pipes.

Most importantly, locate, identify and insulate pipes susceptible to freezing — typically near outer walls, garages, basements, in crawl spaces, or in the attic. Wrap pipes with UL-approved heat tape and seal air leaks. It is vital to disconnect garden hoses and shut off water sprinkler lines, pool supply lines, and drain water from pipes leading to outside faucets

Tips to keep water in your home’s pipes from freezing:

Fit exposed pipes with insulation sleeves or wrapping to slow the heat transfer, often times the more insulation the better.

Seal cracks and holes in outside walls and foundations near water pipes with caulking.

If you do discover frozen pipes:

1. While you examine your frozen pipes, verify, if possible, if the pipe is split before you thaw it. If that has happened, only the ice itself is protecting your home from water damage.
2. Never try to thaw pipes with an open flame or torch; try thawing them with a hair dryer.
3. Be mindful of the risk of electric shock in and around standing water.
4. If you cannot determine whether the pipe is split you must be able to locate, access and turn the main water valve off while you attempt to thaw your frozen pipes. If pipes burst, stop the flow of water as soon as possible to minimize damage.

5. Call a plumber and contact your insurance agent right away.

Frozen pipes outside your home:

Pipes outside your home such as pipes that travel into a metering well and are exposed to air may freeze. Since moving water does not freeze, it is suggested to leave a faucet dripping at the lowest level of the house to prevent this type of occurrence. The constant movement of the water will prevent freezing. If outside pipes do freeze, you should apply heat to slowly thaw the pipes and allow the water to flow. Never try to thaw pipes with an open flame or torch.

**Preventing water damage is much less expensive than paying for costly repairs.**