

## Safety Tips

### Identify, Thaw, and Monitor Frozen Pipes



**Check your buildings and inspect for possible frozen pipes.** When pipes freeze, property managers face panicky calls from residents, buildings without running water, costly emergency repairs, and loss or damage to buildings and tenant property. The resulting damage can cost more than \$10,000 to repair.

Property managers in every region of the country need to take winter safety measures to protect their buildings' pipes. In warmer climates, buildings often lack proper insulation, increasing the likelihood of freezing when temperatures drop.

Be alert to warning signs—bulging pipes; frost-covered pipes; a lack of running water; or a sink, tub, or toilet that will not drain—and take immediate action to prevent pipes from cracking or bursting. The most common pipe freezes occur in unheated interior areas like basements, crawl spaces, and exterior walls and water supply lines. Consider placing ordinary thermometers in hard to heat rooms, close unnecessary openings, and make provisions for monitoring unattended facilities.

### What To Do If A Pipe Bursts

1. Shut off the water. Don't wait until a pipe bursts to find out where the shut-off valve is located.
2. If a pipe bursts near electrical switches or fuse boxes, turn off electricity in that area.
3. Move furniture and other items away from the area to begin the drying out process.
4. Contact a licensed plumber as soon as possible to remedy the problem.
5. To prevent mold and mildew, remove as much water as possible using a sump pump, a wet-dry vacuum or contact a remediation vendor for assistance.
6. Record all damage and contact your insurance carrier if necessary.

### What To Do When The Temperature Drops

#### Identify and inspect frozen pipes

Look for visible pipes coated in frost or are bulging—this is a warning sign that the pipe is frozen. However, not all pipes in your building will be visible. If you notice the water is not flowing from faucets, your building likely has a frozen pipe(s). Take immediate action to prevent frozen pipes from cracking due to the pressure. If water is not running anywhere in the building, a pipe near the water meter may be frozen. If water is running only in a portion of the building, a pipe in an exterior wall or uninsulated area is likely frozen.

It is important to note that freezing can extend to building drain lines, usually identified when a toilet, sink, or tub stops draining. In severe cold weather, water running slowly into a drain pipe can lead to ice build-up resulting in a frozen or burst drain pipe. Be sure there are no leaky supply valves or running toilets in the building.

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## Thaw And Monitor Frozen Pipes

- Once you have identified a frozen pipe(s), the thawing process can begin for those pipes located in easily accessible areas.
- As you thaw the frozen pipe, water and steam will escape through the open faucet. Always start the thawing process nearest to the faucet. Work your way down to the blockage to help prevent steam from getting trapped in the pipe and building up enough pressure to burst.
- Locate the shutoff valve for the pipe(s) you are thawing first to ensure you can quickly shut off the water if necessary.
- Open all faucets; as you treat the frozen pipe(s), water will begin to flow through the frozen area, and this will help melt the ice.
- Gradually apply heat to the frozen section of the pipe. Conventional thawing techniques include wrapping pipes in towels soaked in hot water or using an electric heating pad. Never pour boiling water directly on a frozen pipe. Carefully monitor heating; the process should be gradual to avoid pipe damage. Do not use open-flame devices such as a blowtorch or propane heater. Open-flame devices create fire hazards and cause the pipe to burst from excessive steam build-up.
- Do not close the faucets until pipes thaw completely. Once able to restore full water pressure, turn the taps off but continue to monitor for any leaks.
- If you cannot locate or access the frozen pipe, contact a licensed plumber immediately to thaw the pipe and prevent further building damage.

### Additional References and Resources

Department of Homeland Security/Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), retrieved from [www.ready.gov/winter-weather](http://www.ready.gov/winter-weather)

Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), retrieved from [www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1417724950595b0f4662b0ea0534cb28e1f40074e6cfcFrozenWaterPipes.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1417724950595b0f4662b0ea0534cb28e1f40074e6cfcFrozenWaterPipes.pdf)

American Red Cross, retrieved from [www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/winter-storm/frozen-pipes](http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/winter-storm/frozen-pipes)

Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety, retrieved from [www.disastersafety.org/wp-content/uploads/Freezing-Bursting-Pipes\\_IBHS-White.pdf](http://www.disastersafety.org/wp-content/uploads/Freezing-Bursting-Pipes_IBHS-White.pdf)

How To Prevent Your Pipes From Freezing In The Winter, <https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/how-to-prevent-your-pipes-from-freezing-in-the-winter>

## Contact our Risk Control Services Team

for more resources and answers to your housing organization's risk-related questions.

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