Tips to Prevent Frozen Pipes:

Being prepared and informed may help you avoid the messy and often expensive issue of frozen pipes.

Why Pipes Freeze

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. Pipes that run against exterior walls that have little or no insulation are also subject to freezing.

Preventing Frozen Pipes

Before the onset of cold weather, prevent freezing of water supply lines and pipes by following these recommendations:

- Drain water from swimming pool and water sprinkler supply lines. Do not put antifreeze in these lines unless directed. Antifreeze is environmentally harmful, and is dangerous to humans, pets, wildlife, and landscaping.
- Remove, drain, and store hoses used outdoors. Close inside valves supplying outdoor hoses. Open the outside hose to allow water to drain. Keep the outside valve open so that any water remaining in the pipe can expand without causing the pipe to break.
- Check to see if there are any openings in your foundation or structure that are letting in cold air and insulate any openings you may find.
- Check around the home for other areas where water supply lines are located in unheated areas. Look in the basement, crawl space, attic, garage, and under kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Both hot and cold water pipes in these areas should be insulated.
- All plumbing must be in a heated space according to building code.
- Consider installing specific products made to insulate water pipes. When insulating your pipes, remember to insulate from the cold and not from the heat by placing the insulation only on the foundation side of the pipes.
- Do not prevent the house heat from keeping your pipes warm.
- Make sure your water meter is protected from the outdoors.
- Plumbing/meters should not in be areas designed to be cold such as fruit cellars. The best solution is to move the plumbing into the heated portion of the house. If this cannot be done, allow warm airflow into the space by opening a door from a heated area of the building. Heat should be allowed to get into the room.
- The coldest winds come from the North. Look for any cracks or gaps in the building’s exterior foundation. Many frozen meters are the result of cold, windy days where the wind blows from the North.

During Cold Weather, Take Preventative 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.
- Keep the thermostat set to the same temperature both during the day and at night.
- 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.
- If the water meter / plumbing is located in an uninsulated room that will not allow for warm air flow, you may want to open a cold water tap, in a sink and leave the water running about a 1/8" stream. Water that is moving it is not apt to freeze.

NOTE: This should only be done on very cold and windy nights. This is a short-term fix as water left running over a three-month period could amount to excessive charges your water and waste water bill.

Frozen Pipes

- If you have no water, your plumbing may have frozen. You should find the water shut off and close it to prevent flood damage. Raise the thermostat to increase the heat in the building.

If your pipes are frozen, it is best to call a qualified plumbing contractor to thaw your pipes safely. Never apply an open flame to a frozen pipe. This cannot only cause a fire, it can also result in the overheating of a pocket of water and cause a sudden explosion of boiling steam, which is extremely dangerous and could cause injury.