



Preventing Frozen Pipes

Indiana Office Of Utility Consumer Counselor

Cold weather can cause serious plumbing problems if you don't take proper precautions. Pipes, whether plastic or copper, can burst if the water within them freezes, leading to very costly repairs. Several preventative steps can help.

Winter Basics

- Know where your home's master shut-off valve is.
- Seal basements and crawl spaces as tightly as possible to keep cold air out. If you have a basement, insulate the walls. If the basement has broken windows, repair them. If you have a crawl space, use vents and doors to eliminate drafts.
- Caulking, sealing, weather stripping and other efforts to improve the energy efficiency of your home will also help decrease the risk of a frozen pipe.
- Insulate any exposed water pipes in cold areas (including basements, crawl spaces and attics). Be sure to carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions on any insulation or heat tape you might use.
- If your water meter is in an underground pit, make sure the lid is not broken and is tightly closed. If the lid is covered with snow, the snow will actually help insulate the meter and keep it slightly warmer than the outdoor temperatures.
- Unhook any hoses that are connected to outdoor faucets. Store them indoors or in the garage during the winter.
- If you are traveling and turn your home's thermostat down to save energy while away, do not set it lower than 55 degrees. Have a neighbor check your home regularly, especially on extremely cold days.
- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommends keeping at least a three-day supply of drinking water on hand for each person in your home. A one-gallon jug per person per day is recommended.

If the Temperature Falls to Zero or Below

- Turn at least one faucet on and let a small, pencil-size stream run (especially at night). Ideally, the faucet should be on an exterior wall.
- If you have a larger, two-story home, let a small stream run from a second faucet upstairs.
- Open cabinet doors to let room temperatures reach exposed pipes under sinks.
- Ask your utility if it offers a small billing adjustment for customers who run water to prevent pipes from freezing.

If Your Pipes Freeze

- Use the master shut-off valve to cut the water flow to the building immediately.
- Call a licensed plumber.
- Not all plumbing systems are the same.
- Attempting to thaw a frozen pipe without a professional plumber's help or advice can lead to serious damages that are very expensive to repair.
- If you proceed carefully and you are not in an area of standing water, you may be able to thaw a pipe with a hair dryer. However, do not attempt this without talking to a plumber first.
- **NEVER attempt to thaw a pipe with a torch or any other kind of open flame!** This is extremely dangerous and can be deadly.
- After a frozen pipe is thawed, turn the water back on very slowly while watching carefully for any leaks. Be prepared to shut your water off at the master valve in case of a leak.

Fast Facts from the Indiana Office Of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC)

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