

Practical Safety and Loss Prevention

From Central Illinois Mutual Insurance Company

Dealing with Frozen Pipes

Extremely cold weather brings the risk of frozen pipes. In addition to being an annoyance, frozen pipes can burst causing water damage. Here are some tips for thawing and preventing frozen pipes.

Thawing Tips:

Rule #1: NEVER use a torch or other device with an open flame to attempt to thaw frozen pipes. You could set your home on fire and risk lives.

Rule #2: NEVER use a heat gun designed for paint or adhesive removal to attempt to thaw frozen pipes. These are much too hot for thawing pipes. Again, you could start a fire.

Rule #3: If you must apply heat to thaw frozen pipes, NEVER use anything hotter than a portable hair dryer. Be patient and move the hair dryer back and forth over the frozen area. A hair dryer may take a little longer, but it is much safer.

If you suspect your pipes are frozen, try the following:

- Turn on the faucet served by the frozen pipe and apply heat working from the faucet back toward the suspected frozen area. This will allow the force of the water to assist your efforts as the ice breaks up.
- Try to get warm air to the pipes.
- Raise the thermostat to increase the temperature in the home.
- Wrap pipes with hot wet towels and replace every few minutes.
- Infrared, halogen, or incandescent heat lamps may be carefully used to warm frozen pipes.

Prevention Tips:

If you know or suspect you have problems with frozen pipes in cold weather, consider the following:

- Leave faucets on a trickle. The cost of water is going to be much less than the damage caused by a burst pipe or a fire, including the cost of your insurance deductible.
- Leave cabinet doors in kitchens and bathrooms open to allow warm air to circulate under sinks.
- Have a plumber relocate pipes to warmer areas.
- Cover pipes with foam insulation. Insulate areas where pipes are run.
- Seal cracks to prevent cold air from entering pipe runs.
- Keep your thermostat at 55 degrees or warmer.
- Consider installing an approved device to circulate water through your pipes.
- Install a freeze alarm device. These devices can be set up to call one or more phone numbers to alert you to cold temperature conditions at your home. Some will also alert you to water leaks and power outages.