Don't Get Caught Out This Winter!!!

Frost damage to water pipes isn't just inconvenient, it's expensive to put right too. Fortunately though all it takes is a few simple precautions to prevent pipe bursts during winter.

Make sure all your staff are aware of the risks from frozen pipes and the ways that frozen pipes can be avoided.

Remember, the pipes within your boundary are your responsibility. If you're in any doubt at all about what to do please seek expert advice.

Helpful Advice

- **How to protect your pipes from frost**
- **Dealing with frost damaged pipes**

S.J. Gartside Property Management Services.

How to protect your pipes from frost

Insulation

Check that all pipework, cisterns and tanks in unheated areas are well insulated. If they are not, insulate them with good quality waterproof foam lagging. This is usually available at your DIY store or local plumbers merchant. Insist on insulation that meets the requirements of British Standard 6700 and Water Supply Regulations.

Stoptaps

Locate, identify and label all stoptaps and valves. Check regularly that they are working correctly. The main stoptap is often to be found under the sink or near to the toilet block.

Heating

During prolonged periods of frost keep buildings heated. If frosty conditions persist set automatic timers to constant or 24 hours and use your thermostat to maintain a low level of heat through the night. Many premises will not have heating installed, if you are going to provide a source of heat for your premises, please remember the restrictions placed on you by your insurers, Portable gas and kerosene space heaters are definitely not allowed.

Draining Down

Even the best insulation will not prevent pipes from freezing when frosty conditions persist. So during lengthy periods of frost, external pipework, outside taps, and exposed plumbing should be isolated and drained down, with draining taps left open. Once the weather conditions have improved the water supply can then be restored. If your outside pipework does not have its own stoptap, you should think about fitting one.

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Modern properties will generally have much better insulation to the walls and roof areas than older ones, and any heat generated within the building will be maintained for longer periods. However even with good insulation the temperatures within an unattended premises will eventually fall to those on the outside when there is no source of heat to maintain them. You should drain down your internal pipework where your premises is likely to be unattended for long periods of time such as seasonal holidays. In periods of severe cold (where the temperature fails to reach 25ºF (–4ºC)), you should consider draining your pipework over weekends or even overnight.

For help with draining down your pipework you can contact an approved plumber. A list of approved plumbers is available from the Institute of Plumbing or the Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors.

Other ways you might protect your pipes

Often the pipework above false and suspended ceiling is a source of problems for the occupier, is often overlooked when surveying the risks associated with frost. Pipework in these areas can present a higher risk than other areas within your property. The ceiling tiles or materials generally provide a reasonably high level of insulation, which will stop any heat rising and warming the pipes. The risk is increased if these pipes have no insulation of their own. You can minimize the risk to these areas by lifting a few ceiling tiles and allowing warmer air into the space above, you should also protect these pipes by laying insulating material such as loft insulation over them.

Cisterns and other water storage tanks should not be insulated underneath.

Contrary to the belief of many, both metal and plastic piping is at risk of freezing and ultimately bursting.

If the worst happens, follow the steps listed in the section entitled **Dealing with frost damaged pipes** on the next page.

Dealing with frost damaged pipes

Freezing

Remember that although damage to pipes occurs during the freezing process, the burst will only become apparent when the water in the pipe thaws. So if freezing has occurred you should first isolate the affected area by closing the stoptap to that supply. If this can't be closed, you should close the external boundary stoptap.

Open taps to sinks, basins, etc. to drain the plumbing system when the thaw takes place. This should reduce damage caused by water escaping from a burst pipe.

In some cases the slowly moving water may be enough to defrost the pipes, but be certain not to leave the taps unattended, the pipes may take some time to thaw but full flow may be resumed rapidly once thawing has reached a certain stage and you may end up with a flood even if your pipes are not burst.

Warning

After freezing has occurred there is a risk of explosion if heat is applied suddenly or intensely. Do not switch on water heating appliances, boilers, immersion heaters etc. until you are sure the system has thawed out.

Reheat the building using a gentle heat from a source permitted by your insurers such as an electric fan heater or oil-filled electric heater or another source that is unconnected with the plumbing or central heating system. Do not try to thaw pipes using a naked flame. A hairdryer can be used to direct heat on to frozen pipes, but take care, there may be a burst pipe that could spray water as is thaws. Always start thawing the pipe at the end nearest the tap.

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Restoring supplies

Once you're satisfied that the plumbing has thawed and no leakage is apparent, close the taps you have opened and slowly open the stoptap. Check the plumbing system for leakage once it's under pressure and, only when you are satisfied all systems are thawed, switch on water heating appliances.

If a leak does become apparent, isolate the affected pipe by closing the stoptap, then call an approved plumber. A list of approved plumbers is available from the Institute of Plumbing or the Association of Plumbing and Heating Contractors.

Overall Warnings:

If you discover water leakage, do not turn on any lights or operate any electrical equipment, immediately isolate your electricity supply, assuming it is safe to do so. Only when you are sure it is safe to do so should you attempt to turn your electric supply back on, turn on only those supplies that are necessary, preferably those that are well away from the water leakage.

If in any doubt about whether you can safely isolate your electric supply, leave the building immediately, call an approved electrician or even the emergency services if you believe the situation to be dangerous. You can minimize the damage from the water leakage by locating and turning off the outside stoptap, which will usually be located in the pavement at the front of your premises.

Never use an ungrounded electrical device near metal pipes or water, or while standing on a concrete floor.

Avoid using torches or heat guns, which create a risk of fire. Too much heat can also generate steam, which in turn can increase pressure inside the pipe and cause it to burst.