Have a Trouble-Free Winter

As temperatures dip below freezing, pipes and faucets near or in exterior walls may be at risk of freezing and bursting, resulting in water problems when warmer temperatures return.

To help avoid broken pipes and costly plumbing bills, the City advises individuals to prepare now by knowing how to shut-off the water to your home in case of emergency and taking the following preventative measures.

1. **Locate the shut-off valve for your home.** If a water pipe should burst, you can turn the valve off and stop the flow of water before any flooding occurs. This shut-off valve is usually found near where the water line comes into your house or basement.
2. **Wrap or insulate your water pipes.** Pipe wrapping and electrical heating tape are available at hardware stores and home improvement stores. You should wrap pipes near outside walls, under the house, and in the attic. If you decide to use the heating tape, follow the directions carefully and be sure to leave the thermostat exposed so it can "feel" the temperature.
3. **Check and repair your home's caulking.** Crawl space vents should be caulked and closed from Fall to Spring. You should also check caulking around all openings in walls where you have outside faucets, electrical outlets, air conditioning ducts, and, of course, doors and windows. If there is caulking where the walls are connected to the foundation, be sure you check it, too.
4. **Don't leave your house, apartment, or condominium during winter without some heat.** Even if you're going to be gone a couple of days, be sure the thermostat is no lower than 60 degrees. Sometimes it's also wise to put antifreeze in commodes, if you can't drain them. (Use caution with anti-freeze, because it is dangerous to pets.)
5. **Check your water meter box lid.** If the meter box lid isn't properly seated, cold air can reach the meter and the pipes.
6. **Consider using available heat sources for some pipes.** Sometimes simply leaving a door open, such a a door under a sink or a door to a garage, will allow heat to reach vulnerable pipes. Heat lamps can also be used to help prevent freezing of pipes. Sometimes, a heat source such as a simple light bulb near the pipe is sufficient.
7. **Never use open flames around a frozen pipe.** An open flame is always a fire hazard, and a flame could cause the water in the pipe to turn into steam and build up enough pressure to split the pipe. Sometimes ice in a pipe will melt if you warm it with a hair dryer or wrap it in hot towels.
8. **A word on allowing faucets to drip during sub-zero weather.** Although it can prevent freezing in some cases, running water to keep pipes from freezing is wasteful. The best prevention is to insulate vulnerable pipes.
9. **Be a Water Watcher.** Call 503-635-0280 during business hours or 503-635-0238 after hours, if you see

water flowing from what appears to be a broken line in the street or in a yard.

The City's Water Department tends to see the most broken lines at the end of the freeze when the temperatures start to warm up and the ice in the water lines starts to thaw and leaks become apparent.

In the case of a broken pipe, shut off the water valve. Most shutoff valves are located where the water line enters the house, either at the front of your house where you connect your hose, or basement near the hot water heater, or inside the garage. Remember, the repair of broken pipes on the customer’s side of the meter is the customer’s responsibility. Contact a professional plumber for repair work.

If you must thaw the pipes yourself, do not use an open flame or propane torch. Not only could you start a fire, but you could create so much heat inside the pipe that the water can turn to steam causing an explosion. Thaw frozen pipes by wrapping them with a thick layer of rags and pour boiling water over the rags or by using a hand held dryer, heat slowly starting closest to the faucet end, working towards the coldest section of the pipe. Remember to never use electrical appliances in areas of standing water because of the risk of electrocution.

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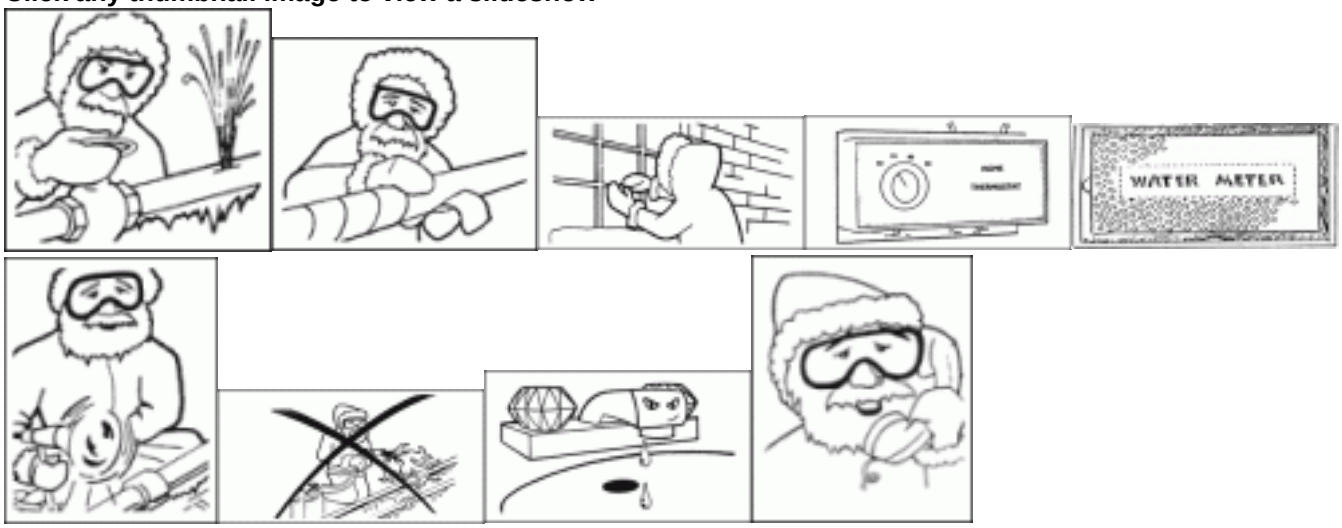

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