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Gem Plumbing & Heating Frozen Pipe Prevention & Maintenance

Preventing Frozen Pipes in Frigid Weather

Frozen pipes, in many instances, can be avoided with a small amount of preparation and preventative maintenance. Following are tips to prevent freezing pipes during frigid weather:

Why does it happen:

During frigid weather, water freezes and expands. Water pipes do not expand causing bursting and possible flooding in your home or business. Pipes that freeze first are those located near outside walls that are exposed to colder temperatures than pipes located throughout the middle of the structure. Some examples include outdoor hose bibs, pool lines, outdoor and indoor sprinkler systems, and other supply lines located in attics, basements, crawl spaces, garages, etc...

What do I do?

The single most important thing to know before the cold hits is where the shutoff valve is and how to use it. Knowing how to shutoff the water supply can prevent severe flooding and damage that usually occurs with bursting pipes. Having every member of your household understand this information is critical in saving your home in the event of a burst pipe.

To determine where your shut off valve is, locate the outside water line that leads to your home. The water line usually flows directly from the water meter to a location inside the residence. The most likely places for the valve to be located are on the internal pipes near your outside walls or where the water enters the structure.

Following are some ideas you can use to prevent frozen and bursting pipes:

- Drain water from swimming pool and water sprinkler supply lines. Do not use antifreeze in these lines as it is environmentally unsafe and is dangerous to humans, pets, wildlife and landscaping.
- Store all outdoor hoses indoors, being sure to close inside valves supplying outdoor hose bibs. Open the outside hose taps to allow water to drain. Keep the outside valve open so that any water remaining in the pipe has the ability to expand without causing the pipe to break.
- Insulate all areas where water supply lines are unheated. Areas to look for are the basement, crawl space, attic, garage, and under kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Both hot and cold water pipes in these areas should be insulated. A hot water supply line can freeze just as fast as a cold water supply line can freeze if water is not running through the pipe.
- There are several different products to consider when preparing to prevent frozen pipes. These products include items made to insulate water pipes such as a “pipe sleeve” or installing UL-listed “heat tape,” “heat cable,” for exposed water pipes. Many products are available at a building supplies retailer. Pipes should be carefully wrapped, with ends butted tightly and joints wrapped with tape.
- Keep garage doors closed tightly if there are water supply lines in the garage.
- Open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors and all other cabinet areas that are located on outside walls, to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. Be sure to take all child safety measures that are necessary in your home.
- Allow the water to trickle slightly from the faucets during frigid weather. Running water will help to prevent frozen pipes.
- During frigid cold snaps, do not alternate temperature settings on your thermostat. Keeping your thermostat set to the same temperature both during the day and at night will help to keep pipe temperatures consistent. If you are leaving for an extended period of time, set your thermostats no lower than 55°F.

Directions for Thawing A Frozen Pipe:

If you observe that there is no flooding, however, your faucet is only trickling water, or there is no water at all, be sure your main water valve is on and suspect a frozen pipe.

- Apply heat to the section of pipe using an electric heating pad wrapped around the pipe, electric hair dryer, a portable space heater (kept away from flammable materials), or by wrapping pipes with towels soaked in hot water. Do not use a blowtorch, kerosene or propane heater, charcoal stove or other open flame device. Make sure a heating pad, hair dryer or other electrical device does not come into contact with water. Do not leave heat **source unattended at any time.

- Keep the faucet open. As you treat the frozen pipe and the frozen area begins to melt, water will begin to flow through the frozen area. Running water through the pipe will help melt more ice in the pipe
- If your house or basement is flooding, turn off the water valve if you can locate it and call 911. **DO NOT TRY TO THAW A BURST PIPE THAT HAS RESULTED IN FLOODING! THIS COULD CAUSE ELECTROCUTION!**
- If you are unable to locate the frozen area, if the frozen area is not accessible or if you can not thaw the pipe, call a licensed plumber.
- Be sure to check all of the other pipes in your home to be sure further freezing has not occurred.

Future Protection:

- Consider relocating exposed pipes to provide increased protection from freezing. For example, if the home is being remodeled, a licensed professional plumber can relocate pipes.
- Increase the amount of insulation around outside pipes in basements, attics, crawl spaces and other areas that are subject to harsh cold weather.

For more information about the prevention and maintenance of frozen pipes, contact Gem Plumbing & Heating at 401-831-7000 or toll free on our helpline at 877-900-HELP (4357)