

Tips To Prevent Frozen Pipes

The following information was compiled from other sources by someone who lives in a very old house in Harpers Ferry that has had pipes freeze in the past. She learned the hard way that it really pays to prepare for cold weather ahead of time and to not skimp on heating when it gets really cold. She also learned how to repair a broken pipe (PVC - whew) and properly thaw frozen pipes.

Be Prepared

Cut some blocks out of foam insulation to block off foundation vents leading to crawl spaces and know where your water shutoff is located in case a pipe breaks. Have on hand a temporary patch kit (sold at home centers) to seal off burst pipes if you must wait for favorable weather to make a permanent repair or to hire a plumber to sweat in a new length of pipe. Find out which local plumbers are equipped and ready to handle frozen pipes.



Turn Up The Thermostat

Old houses built over an uninsulated crawl space need to be protected by turning up the thermostat. This will increase the air temperature in the crawlspace by projecting heat energy through the floor into the space. Plan on insulating and air sealing the space.

Install Fiberglass

Buy some unfaced fiberglass insulation, and installation gear: heavy duty disposable coveralls, dust mask, work gloves and fresh utility knife blades. Don the gear and assess insulation needs in the attic, crawl space or other out-of-the-way place installing insulation over poorly-protected pipes. Neatness doesn't count, just get the insulation where it needs to go.

Use Foam Board To Insulate Large Areas

If a really big area needs protection, keep the heat in with a barrier built with foam board. Faced or unfaced foam board will work, especially if this is a temporary set up. Mark the surface of the foam board with a carpenter's pencil or a Sharpie pen, score to the depth of a utility knife (if need be, score it from both sides) and snap it on the line. Hold it to wood framing with 1-1/4-in or 1-5/8-in. coarse-thread drywall screws.

Install A Heating Cable

Install a heat trace cable to keep a cold pipe from freezing. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on the packaging for how to do this. Some heat tapes are wrapped around the pipe, others simply run along it. Sometimes this cable is cut to length from a roll, in which case you may have to buy a kit (or separate parts) to convert into a working heat trace cable. In other cases, the cable is sold ready to use, with one end safely terminated and insulated and the other end with an electrical plug. Heating cables are found at home centers and electrical supply house.

Place A Space Heater

Keep unprotected pipes above freezing by simply placing an electric heater near them. The goal is not to make the space toasty warm and comfortable. It's to keep the water in the pipe above freezing.

Open Cabinet Doors

It's not unusual for plumbing running to a kitchen sink on an exterior wall to be extremely vulnerable because the wall is not insulated. Open the cabinet doors along that wall to project heat into the space. Place an electric heater in front of the cabinets for an extra measure of cold protection.

Open the tap on really cold days

Let the water run no faster than a slow constant drip. The possible rise in the water and electric bills is cheaper than repairing a burst pipe. First, start a slow drip on the hot side faucet, then a faster drip on the cold side faucet.

Turn Off The Water

In the worst case, turn off the main water valve while the house is unoccupied. If a pipe freezes and breaks, the spillage is limited only to the water in the pipe.

For even more information: <https://www.wikihow.com/Prevent-Frozen-Water-Pipes>