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Keep green in your pocket and on the planet while adding comfort at home.

Winter Preparation: Pipes, Plumbing and Hoses

Getting ready for those winter cold snaps ahead of time could save you a last minute trip outdoors on a very chilly night. Here's a checklist of things to do.

Before Cold Weather...

Disconnect

Detach all those water hoses from the house and drain them before storing for the winter.

Insulate

Cover all pipes in your home's crawl space and attic with some type of insulation. You can find pipe wrapping materials at any hardware or building supply store. Consider covering your outdoor faucets, as well.

Seal

Cold winds blowing through holes and crevices in your house won't only drive up your heating bill but can also freeze nearby pipes. Use weather-stripping and caulk to save your money and your pipes. Be careful not to plug air vents that are used by combustible appliances such as your gas water heater.

Identify

Know exactly where that master water shut off valve is for your house way before you actually need to use it! It is usually located where the water line enters your house (or near the water heater or washing machine). Paint it a bright color, keep it accessible, and make sure everyone in the household knows where it is.

If A Freeze Is Forecast...

Drip the Faucets

A trickle of hot and cold water could be all it takes to keep your pipes from freezing. Letting warm water drip overnight from a faucet next to an outside wall will do the trick.

Open the Cabinets

Allow your pipes to steal warmth from the room by opening the cabinet doors under the sinks. Especially those next to an outside wall.

If Your Pipes Freeze...

Don't Panic

If you turn on the faucets and no water comes out, leave the faucets on and call a plumber. If you can determine that a burst has occurred, leave the faucet on and turn the water off at the master shut-off valve.

No Open Flames!

Never try to unfreeze a pipe using an open flame due to the potential of fire.

How To Thaw

Use a low heat setting on a blow dryer with caution—keep in mind that if there is a burst somewhere in the line, you will have water gushing there once thawed. Don't just heat one area of the pipe as you can cause it to burst. And, again, know where that master water shut-off valve is so you can stop the water quickly if needed.

Leaving Home...

Set the Thermostat

Before you go on vacation, remember to lower the setting on your thermostat but no lower than 55 degrees.

Ask a Friend

While you're gone, have someone check on your house routinely, especially during those cold snaps to make sure everything is okay with your pipes.

Shut off the Water

For longer vacations consider shutting off and draining the water system. The best way to ensure your pipes don't freeze is for them to have no water in them.