

Risk Control Services Bulletin

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Preventing frozen pipes

Freezing temperatures can be concerning due to issues, such as frozen water pipes, that can be avoided with a little planning and a few simple steps. When frigid arctic air hits, water freezes, and as it expands during freezing, it causes pipes to burst and possible flooding to occur. Domestic water lines, heating/cooling systems, and sprinkler systems are all susceptible to this phenomenon.

Before freezing weather

- Preventative maintenance (building envelope - keep the cold weather outside)
 - Seal/caulk windows, doors, electrical outlets, and ensure weather-stripping is in good condition
 - Insulate wall cavities
 - Insulate water pipes exposed to cold temperatures or drafts
- Preventative maintenance (heating systems)
 - Maintain heating equipment according to manufacturer recommendations
 - Inspect filters and piping for obstructions (e.g. dust, sludge, etc.)
 - Verify that dampers, vents, and valves are in the proper positions, allowing for adequate air movement/water flow
- Consider monitored low temperature alarms in strategic locations to provide warning prior to freezing conditions
- Frequently inspect (daily) unoccupied building areas susceptible to cold weather conditions for cold temperatures, drafts, dampness, water staining, etc. (e.g. vacant tenant spaces, mechanical rooms, sprinkler rooms, concealed spaces, etc). Maintain a log of all inspections
- Know the locations of all water system piping — ensure lines are contained in wall cavities or ceiling spaces that may experience colder temperatures than adjacent rooms are insulated properly
- Keep portable electric heaters available. Note: Portable heaters should only be used as a last resort and a temporary solution. Ensure extension cord use is limited and that the heaters have tip-over protection as well as a thermostat

During freezing weather

- Allow water to trickle slowly from faucets during abnormally cold weather — this helps prevent pipes from freezing
- Don't set thermostats (including vacant areas) lower than 13°C (55°F), in areas with domestic water lines
- Buildings equipped with fire sprinkler pipes: areas with wet system sprinkler system piping (including sprinkler valve rooms for wet and dry systems) must be maintained at a minimum of 5°C (40°F) to be in accordance with fire code requirements intended to prevent freezing lines
- Open cabinet doors and run fans to allow warmer air to circulate around plumbing (where piping is situated within enclosed vanities along exterior walls)

Response

- Consider monitored liquid sensors in strategic locations to provide early detection of leaks
- Know the location of all isolation valves and the areas they service. Doing so should facilitate a prompt response and reduce the time required to stop the flow (plot locations on floor plans and identify valves located in concealed spaces using colour coded stickers or tags).
- Keep tools and supplies required to shut valves readily available at all times

Important Information: The information contained herein may relate to typical regulations, codes, and standards applicable in Canada. Additional requirements as required by the provincial/territorial authorities and/or applicable municipal bylaws should also be reviewed.

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