



Adventist Risk  
Management, Inc.

# PREVENTING FROZEN PIPES

*The frigid temperatures of winter increase the potential for frozen and damaged water pipes, causing subsequent water damage to a building. Here are four basic but precautionary actions to reduce the chance of frozen pipes and water damage in your home or buildings.*



## **1. BUNDLE UP**

Before cold weather arrives, bundle up your plumbing. Pipes protruding through walls to the outside and exterior faucets should be insulated, as should pipes running through attics, crawlspaces, garages and other unheated areas.

Hot water pipes are not always hot and should be protected where exposed. Where extreme cold weather exists, consider using heat tape or thermostat-controlled heat cables to keep exposed, vulnerable pipes protected from freezing. Only use such equipment if it is Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) approved.



## 2. **OUTSIDE DOWN, INSIDE UP**

When outside temperatures drop below freezing (32 F°/0 C°), ensure the heat inside is turned up. This is particularly important when leaving buildings empty for an extended period of time, including classrooms over the weekend and churches on weekdays.

If you need to leave a building vacant for a long time, consider shutting off water and draining lines by opening faucets at the highest and lowest points. This process may also require blowing air through the pipes to remove water from low spots.

Open cabinet doors under sinks in kitchens and bathrooms, to allow heated air to circulate underneath. Do the same for other cabinets along walls where there might be plumbing. Keep room doors open to enhance the circulation of warm air throughout the building.

Most sources indicate that heat should be left on and set to no lower than 55 F° or 12.78 C°. If you know that your building is poorly insulated, turn the heat up higher. In some instances, let the cold water run continuously. A stream of water slightly less than a pencil width is recommended.

## 3. **WINTERIZATION**

This refers to the process of preparing for winter. Some winterization practices will help prevent pipes from freezing, such as:

- Seal gaps where pipes enter buildings.
- Stop drafts.
- Seal leaks around doors and windows to prevent the penetration of cold air into the facility.
- Disconnect water hoses from all faucets. When connected, water in the hose can freeze and expand, causing faucets and connecting pipes inside the building to freeze and break. Where buildings have interior shutoff valves for outside faucets, close the valves and drain water from the pipes leading to the outside.

There are other “winterizing” activities that should be done each year, such as cleaning gutters and downspouts. Take the time now to ensure that your buildings are prepared for the cold season. On bitterly cold days, visit churches and other empty buildings to check for problems.

## 4. **IF PIPES FREEZE**

Be very cautious when thawing pipes. There are numerous statistics on record concerning building fire losses due to pipe thawing activities.

Both metal and plastic pipes, if accessible can be heated with a hair dryer, but move the dryer continuously along the length of the pipe and do not stay focused on one small area too long. A grounded electrical heating pad on low, or hot wet rags wrapped around pipes can also be effective. Do not use any electrical tools if floors and other areas are wet, as electrical shock can occur. Do not use a flame device to thaw metal pipes.

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## **ARM Cares**

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