

## **Safety Smarts-Preventing Frozen Pipes**

©Patrice Hampson 2003

The statistics are staggering. In the coldest of winters, a quarter of a million families have their homes damaged and their lives disrupted because of water pipes that freeze and burst. Just last week the South Meadow School as well as several homes in the Peterborough experienced such a disruption. Both plastic (PVC) and copper pipes may burst and just an eighth-inch crack in a pipe can release up to 250 gallons of water a day. If this happens in your home, you will wish you had the foresight of Noah. I don't have a direct line to Noah, but both the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the New England Water Works Association advise the following:

If you detect that your water pipes have frozen and burst, **TURN OFF THE WATER AT THE MAIN SHUT-OFF VALVE IN THE HOUSE; LEAVE THE WATER FAUCETS TURNED ON AND NOTIFY YOUR PLUMBER.**

Call the Peterborough Fire & Rescue or your local fire department in the event of flooding conditions or if you have difficulty turning off the water flow. They are prepared to assist in the first stages of clean up, and will check for dangerous conditions, which can develop due to the flooding. Further clean up and reduction of water damage will require a water damage specialist and coordination with your insurance carrier.

If your pipes are frozen but not burst, **DON'T TAKE CHANCES.** Turn on your faucets and if nothing comes out, leave the faucets turned on and call a plumber. **NEVER** try to thaw a pipe with a torch or other open flame. Instead, try a hair dryer or heating pad only if you are not in an area of standing water. Risk of electrocution is high. If you are unable to locate the frozen area or if the frozen area is not accessible, again call a licensed plumber.

Prevention is the key to safety. If you haven't already, locate and insulate pipes in crawl spaces and attics since they are the most susceptible to freezing. Heat tape, pipe sleeves or thermostatically-controlled heat cables can be used to wrap pipe. Use UL listed materials and only for the use intended (exterior or interior).

With the severe wind chills we've been experiencing, just a tiny opening can let in enough frigid air to cause a pipe to freeze. Seal leaks that allow cold air inside, near where pipes are located. Check around electrical wiring, dryer vents and pipes. Use caulk or insulation to keep cold out and heat in.

During extremely cold weather, allow your faucets with plumbing in exterior walls to drip to relieve excessive pressure when pipes begin to freeze. If both hot and cold water lines serve the same spigot, make sure both lines are dripping since both are subject to freezing.

Many of you retreat from the winter elements and head south for some warm relief. Before you depart, set your home thermostat no lower than 58 degrees. You may ask a trusted friend or neighbor to check your house daily to be certain the temperature remains constant. Some people prefer to shut off and drain the entire home water system.

Some residential fire sprinklers use anti-freeze and are unaffected by the cold. Other designs may be interconnected with domestic plumbing. Owners of these interconnected systems should ask the installer for appropriate advice.

Hopefully, with proper prevention, burst pipes and flooding will not be an issue for you this winter. Just don't ignore this advice!

Patrice Hampson,  
Peterborough Fire & Rescue Auxiliary