

VERNONIA RURAL FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Preventing and Thawing Frozen Pipes

Why pipe freezing is a problem

Water has a unique property in that it expands as it freezes. This expansion puts tremendous pressure on whatever is containing it, including metal or plastic pipes. No matter the “strength” of a container, expanding water can cause pipes to break. Pipes that freeze most frequently are those that are exposed to severe cold, like outdoor hoses, swimming pool supply lines, water sprinkler lines, and water supply pipes in unheated interior areas like basements and crawl spaces, attics, garages, or kitchen cabinets. Also, pipes that run against exterior walls that have little or no insulation are also subject to freezing.

Preventing Frozen Pipes

Before the onset of cold weather, prevent freezing of these water supply lines and pipes by following these recommendations:

- Drain water from swimming pool and water sprinkler supply lines following manufacturer’s or installer’s directions. Do not put antifreeze in these lines unless directed. Antifreeze is environmentally harmful, and is dangerous to humans, pets, wildlife, and landscaping.
- Remove, drain, and store hoses used outdoors. Close inside valves supplying outdoor hose bibs. Open the outside hose bibs to allow water to drain. Keep the outside valve open so that any water remaining in the pipe can expand without causing the pipe to break.
- Check around the home for other areas where water supply lines are located and are in unheated areas. Look in the basement, crawl space, attic, garage, and under kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Both hot and cold water pipes in these areas should be insulated. A hot water supply line can freeze just as a cold water supply line can freeze if the water is not running through the pipe and the water temperature in the pipe is cold.
- Consider installing specific products made to insulate water pipes like a “pipe sleeve” or installing UL-listed “heat tape,” “heat cable,” or similar materials on exposed water pipes. Many products are available at your local building supplies retailer. Pipes should be carefully wrapped, with ends butted tightly and joints wrapped with tape. Follow manufacturer’s recommendations for installing and using these products. Newspaper can provide some degree of insulation and protection to exposed pipes - even ¼” of newspaper can provide significant protection in areas that usually do not have frequent or prolonged temperatures below freezing.

During Cold Weather, Take Preventive Action

- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage.
- Open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. Be sure to move any harmful cleaners and household chemicals up out of the reach of children.
- When the weather is very cold outside, let the cold water drip from the faucet served by exposed pipes. Running water through the pipe - even at a trickle - helps prevent pipes from freezing because the temperature of the water running through it is above freezing.
- Keep the thermostat set to the same temperature both during the day and at night. If you will be going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home, set to a temperature no lower than 55°F.

To Thaw Frozen Pipes Safety First

Propane torches or an open flame can ignite wood beams, flooring and other combustible materials around pipes. Use a hair dryer to thaw frozen pipes. Pipes that warm too fast can break. If you turn on a faucet and only a trickle comes out, suspect a frozen pipe. Locate the suspected frozen area of the water pipe. Likely places include pipes running against exterior walls or where your water service enters your home through the foundation.

- Keep the faucet open. As you treat the frozen pipe and the frozen area begins to melt, water will begin to flow through the frozen area. Running water through the pipe will help melt more ice in the pipe.
- Apply heat to the section of pipe using an electric heating pad wrapped around the pipe, and electric hair dryer, a portable space heater (kept 3 feet away from flammable materials.) Do not use a blowtorch, kerosene or propane heater, charcoal stove, or other open flame device. A blowtorch can make water in a frozen pipe boil and cause the pipe to explode. All open flames in homes present a serious fire danger, as well as a severe risk of exposure to lethal carbon monoxide.
- Apply heat until full water pressure is restored. If you are unable to locate the frozen

area, if the frozen area is not accessible, or if you cannot thaw the pipe, call a licensed plumber.

- Check all other faucets in your home to find out if you have additional frozen pipes. If one pipe freezes, others may freeze, too.

Future Protection

- Consider relocating exposed pipes to provide increased protection from freezing.
- Add insulation to attics, basements and crawl spaces. Insulation will maintain higher temperatures in these areas.
- For more information, please contact a licensed plumber or building professional.



Right: Lt. Dan Hanson and FF Randy Carlton show off their lit up turn-outs while handing out candy canes to parade spectators. Below: Old Red, driven by FF Norm Brown, pulls Santa and Mrs. Claus in their sleigh in the annual Christmas Light Parade.



Christmas Tree Safety



As you deck the halls this holiday season, be fire smart. A small fire that spreads to a Christmas tree can grow large very quickly.



PICKING THE TREE

- » Choose a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched.



PLACING THE TREE

- » Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 2” from the base of the trunk.
- » Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights.
- » Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit.
- » Add water to the tree stand. Be sure to add water daily.



LIGHTING THE TREE

- » Use lights that have the label of a recognized testing laboratory. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use.
- » Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Connect no more than three strands of mini string sets and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs. Read manufacturer’s instructions for number of LED strands to connect.
- » Never use lit candles to decorate the tree.
- » Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.

After Christmas

Get rid of the tree after Christmas or when it is dry. Dried-out trees are a fire danger and should not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside against the home. Check with your local community to find a recycling program. Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and make them last longer.

FACTS

- ❗ One of every three home Christmas tree fires are caused by electrical failures.
- ❗ Although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur, they are more likely to be serious.
- ❗ A heat source too close to the tree causes roughly one in every six of the fires.

Calls responded to November 1-30

Fire	1
Emergency Medical Service	23
Hazardous Condition	2
Service Call	4
Good Intent Call	3
Total	33



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