

How to Keep Pipes from Freezing in Toronto's Winter



Winters in Toronto can get mighty cold. While the residents of the city are used to the cold weather, the freezing temperatures can cause all sorts of problems for our homes and businesses. As the temperatures drop, one of the most serious problems that Toronto homes face is the potential for [frozen pipes](#). In the best of situations, a freezing pipe disrupts the flow of water in the home, but it can also cause pipes to burst. When this occurs, it not only disrupts the flow of water to the lines, but it can also make a terrible mess and cause damage to other parts of the home.

When it comes to frozen pipes, the best answer is to be prepared. You should do what you can to keep pipes from freezing. Along with taking steps to prevent the freezing of pipes, you should also know what to do when a pipe does freeze, and in the worst-case scenario, you should also be prepared for the possibility of a pipe freezing and bursting. In this post, we are going to look at some practical steps that you can take to prevent frozen pipes, and we are also going to provide some advice for what to do when a pipe does freeze.

How to keep pipes from freezing

Ideally, you don't want your pipes to freeze or burst in the first place. By taking some simple measures to prevent the freezing of pipes, you can avoid the stress and potential damage that occurs when pipes freeze. The following are a few tips for preventing frozen pipes.

Insulate the Home

One of the first steps is to assess the insulation in areas like the attic, crawlspace and garage. These areas of the home don't usually get heat from the furnace, and they may be poorly protected against heat loss. By adding some insulation, you could help to keep the temperatures higher, and this could be one measure that will protect against frozen pipes.

Turn up the Heat

If you have pipes that are poorly protected in some areas of the home, turning up the thermostat can help. Homeowners commonly turn the heat down at night or when they are away at work during the day. When the heat is turned down, it can expose some of the pipes that are on exterior walls to an increased risk of freezing. It might cost you a little more on your heating bill, but it could prevent the costly problems that will come with a burst pipe.

Remove Outdoor Hoses

Remove any hoses you have from the outdoor faucets. Drain the hoses and store them away for the winter. If there is a shutoff valve for the outdoor lines, close the shutoff and drain the lines. You could also leave the hose bibs open so if any water does stay in the line, it has room to expand without damaging the pipe.

Insulate Exposed Pipes

Go to the unheated areas of the home and look for exposed pipes. This would be areas like the garage, the attic and the crawlspace. If you find exposed pipes that are not insulated, buy insulation to protect these pipes against cold

weather. You can even buy specialised pipe insulation that is designed to wrap around the exposed pipes.

Open Cabinets Under Sinks

Go to all of the bathrooms and kitchens and look for pipes that are in the cabinets beneath the sinks. With the doors closed, heat cannot get into the cabinet, and this could increase the potential for a frozen pipe. This risk increases if the cabinet is on an exterior wall. Leave the doors to these cabinets open, and this will allow warm air into the space and this can protect against the potential for freezing.

Heating Cables and Heat Tape

You could also go to the hardware store and buy something like heat tape or a heating cable. These products have an electric heating element that can be used to maintain the temperature of pipes that are at risk for freezing. You wrap the pipes with the tape or the heating cable, and then plug it in. This can be an effective means to prevent the potential for frozen and burst pipes in the winter.

Let some Faucets Drip

Under most circumstances, you would not want to allow your faucets to drip. However, when it is cold outside, leaving the water running at a trickle can be one way to prevent freezing. If you have any lines that are exposed to cold temperatures, you could go to one of the fixtures supplied by that line and leave it open at a slow drip. By allowing water to move through the line – even just a little – you can reduce the risk of the line freezing.

Use a Space Heater

Areas like the crawlspace and attic are not covered by the home heating system. To compensate for the lack of heating, you could use a space heater to keep the pipes from freezing. All you have to do is place the heater near the exposed pipes, and this should provide an effective form of protection. Remember, you are not trying to heat the space to make it comfortable for

humans, you just want to heat it enough to prevent the potential for a frozen pipe.

If You Leave Town

You wouldn't be the first person to leave town during the winter, only to come home and find a pipe that has frozen and burst. If you are going away for a few days, make sure to set the temperature no lower than 13°. If you are really worried about the potential for a frozen pipe while you are away, you could close the main and drain the lines. If you do choose to close the main, leave some of the sinks open just a little. This will protect against any the freezing of any water that might be left in the line.

Relocate Pipes

This is a worst-case scenario solution, but some homeowners may need to consider moving water lines that run on exterior walls. If you are having problems with frozen pipes in exterior walls, you might need to contact a plumber that can come out and move the pipes to an area where they won't be exposed to such low temperatures.

Thawing Frozen Pipes

If you take the proper steps to prevent frozen pipes, there is a good chance that you can avoid problems. If you already have a pipe that is frozen, then you are going to need to take steps to thaw the pipe.

If it is cold outside and you go to turn on the sink, only to find that little to no water comes out, there is a good chance that the line is frozen. To restore the flow of water, you will need to take steps to locate the frozen pipe and thaw the frozen water that is inside.

Finding the Pipe

Start by testing different fixtures in the home. If the flow of water is low or there is no water at all, you can assume that the line is frozen. The first places to look are in areas like the attic and the crawlspace. The problem may also

be in a pipe that runs through an exterior wall. To find the frozen section that is obstructing the flow, run your hand along the pipe and look for areas that appear to be bulging.

Apply Heat

The next step is to apply heat to the frozen section of the pipe. As a tip, you should keep the line open so water can flow through as it thaws. The flowing water can assist in the thawing process. To apply heat to the pipe, you should use something like an electric heating pad or a hairdryer. You could also place a space heater near the pipe to raise the temperature. If you do not have any of these items, you could wrap the pipe in towels that are soaked in hot water. What you do not want to do is expose the pipe to an open flame. Do not try to heat the pipe using a blowtorch or any other device that uses a flame to provide heat.

Wait for Full Pressure

Don't stop when you start to see more water coming out of the sink. You want to make sure to keep heating the pipe until full pressure is restored. Once you have full pressure at the fixture that has a problem, go around and check all of the fixtures in the home to make sure the problem is completely resolved.

If all else Fails, Call a Plumber

In some cases, you might have trouble locating the section of frozen pipe or thawing the pipe. If you can't find the frozen pipe or restore the flow of water, that means that it is time to call in a licensed plumber.

What to do when frozen pipes burst

Under the worst circumstances, the pipe won't just freeze, it will also burst. When this occurs, you need to act fast to prevent further damage. As a recommendation, you should keep a temporary patch kit in the home. You don't want to patch the pipe and forget about it, but it can provide you with a little time while you wait for a plumber.

Turn off the Water Supply

The first step is to turn off the water supply for that line or at the main. Once you have the water turned off, open the faucets and fixtures to drain the line as much as possible. By cutting off the flow and removing water from the line, you can prevent further damage.

Remove Sensitive Items from the Area

Once you have the water turned off, you should remove any electrical items from the area. In some cases, you may need to turn off the breaker for certain areas of the home. If you have any possessions that could be damaged by the water, try to move them to an area of the home that is not affected by the burst pipe.

Temporary Repair

Try to apply a temporary repair. If you have a patch kit, that could be a good way to prevent more water from leaking from the pipe. You could also buy a sleeve clamp to act as a temporary repair. If neither of these options is available, you might be able to use duct tape if the pipe only has a small hole or crack. Just remember that none of these solutions should be viewed as a permanent fix. They are just temporary fixes to buy you the time that will be necessary to perform a more permanent repair.

Contact Insurer

You will want to document the damage as much as possible. Take pictures of the pipe and any areas of the home that have been affected by water that may have leaked from the pipe. Documentation can be vital when you go to file a claim with your insurer.

Get the Pipe Fixed

In most cases, fixing a burst pipe is a job better left to the professionals. Once you have the situation under control, it is time to get a plumber on the scene to perform the necessary repairs. Along with getting the pipe fixed, you may also need to repair components of the home that were damaged by the

leaking water. Look for things like sheetrock that may have been damaged by the water, and consider the potential for mould that may come with areas that are saturated with water.

Living in Toronto means that you should be prepared for the effects of cold temperatures. In getting prepared for winter, you should prepare your home and protect it from the potential damage that can occur when a pipe freezes. Prevention is generally a low-cost endeavour, and it can save you a ton of stress and the potential for costly repairs. If you find that you do have an issue with a frozen or burst pipe, it is important to address the problem right away.

[Frozen Pipes](#), [Pipe Bursting](#), [Toronto](#), [Winter](#)