

The Frozen Ghost

Frozen water pipes are the most common plumbing issue this chilly time of year. That issue quickly becomes a crisis when the freezing water expands to the point of bursting your water pipes. The resulting plumbing repairs and property damage can be both costly and messy.

Prevention

With the right precautions, a burst pipe can be avoided:

- Plumbing most susceptible to freezing are pipes that lead outdoors and those that run along concrete walls or walls that have not been insulated, typically in the basement, crawlspace or attic.
- Shut off the water supply to outside pipes. Open the outside valve fully to drain excess water and keep it open through the winter so that any residual water can expand without causing the pipe to break.
- Purchase specially designed foam pipe covers to insulate exposed outdoor water pipes. Wrap pipes in cold areas, those running along concrete or uninsulated walls, with insulation.
- When the temperature dips below minus 1° Celsius and you've had previous and unresolved issues with frozen pipes, turn an indoor cold-water tap on allowing a slight trickle to flow. Running water is less likely to freeze.

Cure

Frozen pipes need your immediate attention to prevent a burst:

- First, turn off the master shutoff valve located on either side of the water meter and turn on a cold-water tap, in the basement if possible. As a frozen pipe may already be broken, it will leak as the pipe thaws.
- Defrost frozen pipes by wrapping them in towels soaked in hot water. Additionally, you can also direct the hot air from a blow dryer on the frozen pipe. It can take an hour or more to thaw out the frozen pipe.
- Never use a torch or flame to defrost a frozen pipe. Overheating one area of a pipe can cause it to burst or the joints to pull apart,
- If your pipes have burst or you discover a crack when thawing your pipes, ensure your main master valve is shut off and contact a licensed plumbing professional immediately.