

Frozen pipes a concern if winter returns

With winter returning and the temperatures dropping, frozen pipes can be a household situation that you may want to get ahead of before you incur damage.

Tahoe Fire Fuels Team offers these steps to prevent frozen pipes and thaw those that are already frozen:

- Insulate all water pipes away from cold moving air and keep them dry. Locate the main water shut off in case you need it. Leaks often happen when the pipe is thawed out.
- Use either heat tape wrapped around the pipes or a heated reflector lamp in a dry enclosed space. On cold nights, check the light to see that it is working. The heat tapes work by a built-in thermostat. In order to work, the tape must be wrapped between the pipe and the insulation.
- If electric power is unavailable or is lost, let the water run no faster than a slow constant drip; this is cheaper than repairing it. First start a slow drip on the hot side faucet, then a faster drip on the cold side faucet. There is no need to run a lot of water. Bathrooms can be cold, as long as they aren't freezing.
- Remember to insulate and heat the drain lines in crawl spaces and cold basements. Again, a heat lamp focused on the drain p-trap will keep it from freezing if it is also protected from moving cold air with a boxed enclosure.
- To thaw a frozen pipe, first check the pipe in the area of the freeze. Some plastic or copper pipes will split and will flood the area when thawed. If the pipe looks broken or has a slit in it, call the plumber.
- It is far better to heat the area around the frozen part

with an electric space heater, a hand-held hair dryer, or a heat lamp in a reflector to prevent a fire. If this is a problem, call the plumber.

- Always disconnect your water hose from your outdoor spigot in the winter, or before the temperature drops below freezing. The water inside the hose can freeze, and the freezing continues back into the spigot until it reaches your pipes. If you have PVC plastic pipe leading to this spigot, it will burst.
- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage.
- Open kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warm air to circulate around the plumbing. Be sure to move any harmful cleaners and household chemicals up out of the reach of children.
- Keep the thermostat set to the same temperature during the day and at night. You may incur a higher heating bill, but you can prevent a costly repair job if pipes freeze and burst. If you are going away during cold weather, leave the heat on in your home and set temperature no lower than 55 degrees Fahrenheit.
- If the house isn't in use during the coldest months, drain the plumbing system before closing the house down. A drained system is the only foolproof way to avoid a freeze-up.
- Heating appliances can cause a fire hazard when manufacturers' recommendations are not followed. Always follow manufacturer's instructions, and consult a professional electrician or plumber when in doubt.
- It is recommended that you have contact numbers for a licensed plumber on hand in case a plumbing emergency occurs.