UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
Cooperative Extension Service
University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture, and County Governments Cooperating

Frozen Plumbing

Frozen or broken water pipes cause damage to homes during extreme cold. If pipes in the walls aren't properly insulated, they can freeze and rupture. (A 1/8-inch crack in a pipe can release up to 250 gallons of water a day, soaking floors, rugs and furniture.)

Some steps that you can take to prevent this damage follow:

Before Cold Weather

- Locate and insulate pipes which are the most susceptible to freezing, typically those near outer walls, in crawl spaces or in the attic.
- Use insulation made especially for insulating pipes.
- Wrap pipes with heat tape (UL-approved).
- Seal any leaks that allow cold air inside where pipes are located.
- Disconnect garden hoses and shut off and drain water from pipes leading to outside faucets. This reduces the chance of freezing in the short span of pipe just inside the house.
- Let hot and cold water trickle at night from a faucet on an outside wall.
- Open cabinet doors to allow more heat to get to uninsulated pipes under a sink or appliances near an outer wall.
- Make sure heat is left on and set no lower than 55°F.
- If you plan to be away, have someone check your house daily to make sure the heat is still on to prevent freezing.
- Drain and shut off sprinkler systems.

If Pipes Freeze

- Shut off the water, in case pipes burst, to minimize the damage caused to your home. If possible, shut off water to just the affected areas. For example, shut off the valve normally located on the cold water side of the hot water tank if a hot water pipe is frozen. This will allow you to continue some of the preventative measures listed above.
- Call a plumber, and contact your insurance agent.
- Never try to thaw a pipe with an open flame or torch or an electrical device that is not fault protected.
- Always be careful of the potential for electric shock in and around standing water.

Doug Petty, Miller County Extension Agent - Staff Chair 12/2/02