Winterize Your Home With These Easy and Inexpensive Tips

With fall and colder weather comes the possibility of burst and frozen pipes. Now is the time to winterize your home plumbing system and prevent pipes from freezing before inclement weather causes a home repair emergency.

If your pipes freeze, there's a chance that the pressure build-up in the pipes may cause them to rupture. In that case, you should turn off water at the main shutoff valve, usually at the point where the water enters the house and call a plumber immediately. No pipe is immune to freezing, and even a small crack in plumbing can spew hundreds of gallons of water, damaging the home, furniture and property. Water damage can cost thousands of dollars and cause mold to develop.

There are several simple DIY winterization measures that are neither expensive nor time consuming and can prevent pipes from freezing. Homeowners who invest in winterization will proactively prevent minor annoyances like frozen pipes or major damage such as a burst water line.

Winterization starts outside – if a home has outdoor faucet bibs or sprinklers, these should be shut off and drained for the winter. If any water remains in the line between the faucet and the shut off valve, it may freeze. Any hoses or splitters should be removed and drained as well, and the tap should be left open to relieve pressure.

Next, any lines that are exposed should be examined. Most of these lines will be found where the water service line comes into the house, likely in a basement, utility room or garage, or beneath kitchen and bathroom sinks. These lines are the ones most likely to freeze, and possibly burst. If a pipe is exposed, it can be easily and quickly insulated with a sleeve that can be purchased at a local hardware store. Pipes should be thoroughly cleaned before they're insulated and the ends and seams of the insulation secured with duct tape.

Pipes in exterior walls are a little trickier. If the home hasn't been insulated in a decade or more – or if a homeowner isn't sure if, or when, a home was insulated – it may be time for an energy audit. Most insulation should last 80 to 100 years, but, if it was fiberglass insulation installed more than 15 years prior or has been damaged, it may need to be replaced.

While homeowners may have to hire a professional to address insulating the walls, they can seal up drafts themselves, especially around doors and windows, with a caulk gun and weatherization strips. Something as simple and easy as replacing a door sweep can draft-proof a home, reduce the energy bill, keep your home comfortable and the water pipes flowing.

When preventing interior pipes from freezing, homeowners should insulate spaces such as attics and crawl spaces and keep their homes at or above 21 degrees. If homeowners have frozen pipes, they should open taps to relieve pressure on the pipes and apply heat by using heating tape or a space heater. Using an open flame is dangerous and can result in a house fire, which is much more hazardous than frozen pipes.

Having pipes run on a slight drip while the temperature is below freezing could help avoid these issues. It's a great life hack to help avoid frozen pipes as it keeps water flowing and helps prevent them from freezing.

You may not have considered that, during a cold snap, plumbers may be in high demand and short supply, meaning you may be without water or partial use of the facilities for several days. Depending on how extensive the loss of water is, you may be forced to relocate until service is restored.

By being proactive, you can avoid a potentially costly and inconvenient water break in your home – don't wait until the cold weather is here to prepare yourself for it.

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