

Frozen and Burst Pipes

When pipes freeze, they can crack and burst, allowing water to escape through the house/building and the current weather conditions have seen many frozen and burst pipes. You can take steps to avoid frozen pipes bursting before they become an expensive problem. Burst pipes can cause extensive damage to property and if you do suffer flooding or water damage following a burst pipe you should seek specialist advice immediately from your insurer or recognised professionals.

The following advice and information applies to both commercial and household properties.

Pipes have burst: Steps to take

A burst pipe and subsequent escape of water can cause serious damage and the following sets out what to do when you have a burst pipe.

1. Cold Water Supply

- a. Turn off the water supply at the main stop tap
- b. If you have a cold-water tank turn off the stopcock. The cold-water tank is usually in the loft or attic
- c. Turn on all the cold taps in the property to drain the system. **Do not** forget to turn the taps off when the system has drained

2. Leaks

- a. Catch any leaking drips with buckets or bowls and block further escape with towels. If available Use plastic sheets to protect from further damage
- b. If the ceiling is beginning to bulge, make a hole in the ceiling to release the water
- c. If the ceiling is already bulged, enter the room with caution. If there is doubt the ceiling is unsafe do not enter the room

3. Heating

- a. Turn off central/water heating and immersion heater
- b. If the central heating uses solid fuel, dampen down and let the fire die out as quickly as possible
- c. Turn on all the hot taps in the property to drain the water system. **Do not** forget to turn the taps off when the system has drained

4. Electrics

- a. If water is leaking near any electrics, including electrical appliances, switch off at the mains
- b. If in doubt, take no chances and turn the electricity off at the mains
- c. Under no circumstances try to dry or fix any electrical faults, as electrical wiring affected by water can be extremely dangerous and requires professional help
- d. If the electrics/appliances are wet, do not under any circumstances touch them

5. Professional Help

- a. Call your insurance company or seek reputable professional help immediately

Pipes frozen: How to prevent frozen pipes from bursting

If you discover frozen pipes, follow these steps to try to avoid the pipes from bursting.

1. Taps

- a. Avoid frozen pipes by leaving a few indoor taps dripping very slightly overnight when the taps are not in use
- b. Check the taps in the morning, and frequently throughout the day. If either the hot or the cold are operable, leave the working tap, be it the hot or cold, at a trickle or a drip. Some of this water might drip down the frozen pipe to melt the blockage
- c. Continue to leave the affected tap(s) dripping for short periods. It is often advisable to leave other taps throughout the property at a drip to avoid other pipes freezing

2. Pipes

- a. If possible check pipes for any splits or forced joints
- b. If there are none, feel the pipe to see if you can find a particularly cold area and then try to thaw the pipe starting at that area, or beginning from the tap end working towards the cold-water tank. This thawing process should be done using moderate heat, for example:
 1. A hairdryer, for a few minutes at a time
 2. Cover with a towel or cloth soaked in hot (not boiling) water
 3. A hot water bottle

Under no circumstances apply intense heat, i.e. using a blowtorch or boiling water and ensure that hairdryers are kept away from water

4. Heating

- a. Keep your home well heated until the pipe is back in working order. This may cost you a little extra in fuel, but it will be nominal compared to the damage a burst pipe can cause
- b. Do not use any electrical appliances that are in danger of becoming wet, i.e. electric fan heaters or fires

5. Professional Help

- a. If the above procedures or rising temperatures do not thaw out the pipe(s), it is highly advisable to call a reputable plumber

Preventing frozen and burst pipes: Steps to take

Prevention is better than cure as water damage from burst pipes can cause significant and expensive damage to properties and their contents. In addition, burst pipes and leaks can be complicated to fix, causing further disruption and expense.

To help avoid the misery of frozen and burst pipes, by taking some simple precautions, you can avoid the inconvenience and expense caused by burst pipes.

- Ensure pipes and tanks are in a good state of repair
- Using good quality lagging, insulate pipes and water tanks. Loft pipes should be underneath loft insulation so heat from below will stop them freezing. Tanks need a minimum of 25mm of lagging or insulation around the tank
- Check roofs, chimneys and gutters for unsafe tiles, cracks, leaks and blockages. Check that downpipes and supporting brackets are also secure
- Turn off the water supply to outside taps to prevent them freezing and insulate as required
- Open the loft trap door on cold days to let heat in
- Repair any dripping taps and faulty ball valves
- Know where your stop tap is and check that you can turn it off easily in an emergency
- If you do not have a heating system that automatically turns on when the temperature drops to a level that will cause your pipes to freeze, leave heating on low or programmed to come on for small bursts several times a day
- If your property is empty have the property checked on a regular basis to check pipes haven't frozen or burst
- If your property is likely to be empty for a while in winter time, seriously consider draining the heating and water systems
- Make sure you are fully insured. Thousands of homes have no contents insurance and a burst pipe can ruin possessions. Ensure your home contents are covered for their full replacement value and that your home is insured for the cost of re-building (not the market value)

The above information is to assist only and Merlin has made all efforts to ensure that the information contained is correct but does not give any warranties or guarantees. Health and safety is of paramount importance and you should seek professional help immediately if you have any doubts around the situation.

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