

Extreme Cold Weather Tips

From the St. Joseph Water Department

Locate & Mark Your Water Service Shut Off Valve

It is very important to know where your main water shut off valve is located inside of your home (or business). If a pipe breaks anywhere in the house – kitchen, bath, basement or crawl space – this valve will turn off the water supply. Typically this valve is located near the water meter, where the water line enters the building. Clearly marking this valve will ensure that everyone in the home knows where it is located and will allow you and others to find the valve quickly in case of a water emergency.

Protect Your Water Meter

It is the property owner's responsibility to protect the water meter from freezing and/or damage. The space where the meter is located must be heated to protect the meter from freezing. If a meter freezes and breaks the cost to replace a frozen or damaged meter is charged to the property owner. Here are some extra precautions you can take to minimize the risk of freezing during extreme cold temperatures:

- Insulate all pipes located next to an outside wall, or in a garage, or any other unheated space, as they are most susceptible to freezing temperatures. Exposed pipes in these areas should be heat wrapped and/or insulated, or alternatively shut off and drained prior to winter weather.
- Open the cupboard doors under sinks. Where possible, open other areas where pipes are located, especially where the plumbing is along an exterior wall, to let interior heat warm the pipes.
- Temporarily keep a steady but slow drip of cold water flowing at an inside faucet farthest from the water meter to keep the water moving, as moving water is less likely to freeze. This precaution may minimize your risk of water pipes freezing. The cost to a customer to run a pencil lead thin stream of water (i.e. a rate of 3 gallons per hour) is about \$0.50 per day. *Note: If you are using more than a pencil lead thin stream then the cost will be more; you can do a bucket test to determine your specific use/cost.*
- If you are away for an extended period of time we suggest you shut your water off at the the valve and leave the thermostat at 55 degrees or higher to minimize the risk of pipes freezing. Another option, for a fee of \$50, you can request the Water Department shut the water off at the curb stop near the road, then you just call us back when you want the water to be turned back on.
- Be a good neighbor and notify the Water Department at 269-983-6324 if you suspect or notice a leak at a vacant home or building.
- To learn more about preventing and thawing frozen pipes, please go to:
<http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/winter-storm/preventing-thawing-frozen-pipes>

When Water Pipes Freeze:

- NEVER thaw a frozen pipe with a torch or an open flame. Safer alternatives include a hair dryer, a fan or hot air blower.
- Do not use electrical appliances in areas of standing water. You could be electrocuted.
- If your water lines are frozen they may have also broken or split, so, it is safest to contact a licensed plumber to avoid additional property damage when the pipes thaw out.
- If there is no water to your home it could be your private plumbing has frozen. It is also possible the Water Department shut off the water to repair a broken water main in the street. If this occurs Water Department field staff will notify impacted residence of the situation. For more information regarding your service please call us at 269-983-6324, or at the 24/7 after-hours emergency number, 269-983-2571.