

Prepare your home for winter

Fact Sheet

As the evenings draw shorter and temperatures begin to drop, there are numerous ways you can protect your home, so you don't get caught out this winter.*

Planning ahead

Damage caused by water escaping is one of the most frequent causes of household claims in the winter.

Regular maintenance will reap rewards, so:

- Have a professional plumber check your plumbing joints for leaks. Remember those which are hidden such as on dishwashers and washing machines and keep an eye out for green discolouration on copper pipes - this could be a sign of a leak. Pay special attention to plastic plumbing joints as they erode quicker than metal ones
- Review your insulation to protect your pipes from freezing
- Prevent your water supply stopcock from stiffening by testing it from time to time
- Carry out regular inspections of water tank ball valves for signs of erosion.

Watch out for frozen pipes

Tell-tale signs of a frozen pipe include no water coming from the tap, frost or ice on the outside of the pipe and if the pipe is bulging. If you act fast, a frozen pipe doesn't always mean a burst pipe:

- Turn off the stopcock
- Remove any furniture or equipment from the area, which may get damaged by the water
- Open the tap closest to the area and begin gently warming the tap with a hairdryer or hot water bottle, starting from the end closest to the tap and working away from the faucet
- Remember, although damage to pipes occurs when they freeze, bursts only become apparent when the pipe begins to thaw.

In the event of a burst pipe

If it's apparent that a pipe in your home has burst, you should:

- Turn off the stopcock and drain the system by opening taps in baths and sinks
- Seek professional advice.

Leaving your property vacant

If you're leaving your home vacant for an extended period of time over the winter months, consider the following:

- Don't lower the heating too much. It may save on the heating bill, but is it worth the risk of a frozen pipe? Leave your central heating on low at around 15°C to prevent existing water from freezing
- Alternatively, particularly in the event of an extended absence from your home, you could drain the plumbing system entirely. If you're considering doing this, you should seek professional advice
- Make sure that pipes in unheated areas like lofts and, where accessible, under floor spaces are insulated with high quality foam lagging
- Have someone keep an eye on your home, who knows where the stopcock is, should they find a leak.

Find out more

For more information on how you can prepare your property for severe winter conditions, see:

- Water UK: www.water.org.uk/consumers/advice/avoid-frozen-or-burst-pipes
- Water Regulations Advisory Scheme website: www.wras.co.uk

*The content of this fact sheet is by no means exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It's not intended to amount to advice on which reliance should be placed. For requirements specific to you or your business, please seek professional advice.