



Winterize Your Home

A quick step outside and a glance at the calendar will remind you of the inevitable – colder temperatures are on their way. For South Dakotans, winter is just a way of life. Taking a little time and the proper steps to winterize your home – and especially your pipes – in preparation for the cold and snow, you can save yourself time and money, and unnecessary heartache.

A broken pipe can add up to big water losses. A 1/8 inch hole can lose 296,000 gallons of water over a three month period of time – about 3,200 gallons a day. That is equivalent to the amount of water that one person will use in a month of normal use. To put things into perspective – it is enough water to fill an 850 square foot basement with six inches of water in just 24 hours. Below are some steps you can take now to winterize your home and keep your pipes from freezing this winter.

Insulate your pipes

Pipes bursting in winter are a homeowner's worst nightmare. Insulate pipes in areas of your home that are not well heated – such as crawl spaces and attics. Wrap them with pre-molded foam rubber sleeves or fiberglass insulation – both of which can be found at your local hardware store. Another option can be to install heat tape – which is basically a special electrical cord that is wrapped around your pipes and emits heat. It is crucial to install UL-approved heat tapes according to manufacturer's instructions so as to not cause an accident or fire. The heat tape should be used on both the water pipes as well as the valves that shut off the water pipes. If you already rely on heat tape to keep your pipes from freezing, inspect it thoroughly to make sure it is working properly as it can burn out after a number of years.

Know where your master shut off and service line valves are located

If there is an emergency, you will need to know where your master shut off valve is in a hurry. If your water meter is in your basement, the valve should be close by. Your service line water valve shuts off water to your whole property ahead of your water meter – and should be marked with a sign.

Inspect your meter pit

You can cover the pit with straw or other insulating material if desired to further protect the meter and pipes. Also remember to mark the location of your meter pit to avoid damage from snowplows and other equipment. If it looks damaged, contact your local rural water provider to come and check it out.

Disconnect outside hoses and faucets

It is very important to disconnect and drain your outside hoses. You should also drain your outside faucets by installing an inside shut-off valve and drain. In-ground lawn sprinklers also need to be drained before winter hits.

Seal Outside Openings and Cracks

Locate places along outside walls, foundations, sill plates, doors and windows that may allow cold air to penetrate your home – and seal with caulk, foam or fiberglass insulation. Close any basement windows and access doors and make sure they are properly sealed.

Other quick tips:

If you are going to be away from your home for a long period of time, have your rural water system shut off your water.

Keep sink cabinet doors open during cold spells or winter power outages to allow warm air to circulate around the pipes.

Trim trees to prevent snow and ice from weighing them down and causing breakage – possibly damaging your home or vehicles.

Clean your gutters. Gutters clogged with leaves and debris can form ice dams, which can cause water to seep into your house and cause damage. Also check to make sure your downspouts are carrying water away from your home's foundation to further prevent flooding or water damage.