

# Frozen Pipes - A Cold Reality

As temperatures drop and winter approaches, ministries that don't have safeguards in place could be inundated with trouble due to frozen, burst pipes. The flood of damage can lead to unusable facilities and stressful repair processes. **Frozen pipes are one of the biggest risks of property damage when the temperature drops.**

"There's a perception that water damage isn't that big of a deal," said Zach Mize, a senior producer and partner with American Church Group of Texas. "But if the water comes from a burst pipe on the second floor or isn't discovered for days, it can destroy equipment, flooring, walls, floors, pews, and more."

While any water pipe can fail without warning, frozen pipes are a major culprit. Northern states aren't the only ones that have to deal with cold temperatures. Freezing weather can be especially troublesome in southern states, where buildings often lack adequate insulation to protect against below-freezing temperatures. Water pipes in attics or above ceiling tiles are also vulnerable to freezing temperatures.

## Before Temperatures Plunge

It's never too early to get ahead of freezing weather. These four tips can help defend your plumbing and protect your property.

### 1. Insulate Pipes

Inspect attics, basements, and other places where pipes run. You may need to better insulate those areas or fit exposed pipes with insulation sleeves. Crawl spaces and riser rooms are other locations that may be at higher risk for freezing pipes since heat may not reach those areas as easily. Seal any cracks or holes in your building exterior or foundation, especially if they are near water lines.

### 2. Inspect Supply Lines & Hoses

It's important to routinely inspect supply lines and hoses, making sure everything is updated regularly to avoid leaks and flooding due to wear and tear. It's also a good idea to periodically replace supply hoses to washers and toilets—a primary cause of water leaks beyond frozen pipes. To reduce the risk of water-related disasters during colder months, remove outdoor hoses from spigots.

### 3. Install a Flow-Based Automatic Water Shut-Off Device

Protecting your building involves a way to automatically shut off the water. This can be accomplished by installing a flow-based automatic water shut-off valve. While there are many on the market to choose from, Brotherhood Mutual recommends FloLogic®. It's an intelligent leak detection device that's installed on the main water supply line as it enters the building. It features a smart sensor that constantly monitors water flow. If it detects irregular water flow, or if the building's temperature drops below a preset level, it automatically shuts off the water. Then it sends an alert via a smartphone app so users know as soon as there's an issue. It's important to work with a locally licensed plumber when purchasing and installing a flow-based leak-detection device.

#### **4. Have a Plan for Power**

If a winter storm strikes, it can knock out power for hours, even days, which means your building won't have any heat. Many ministries install back-up generators to maintain some basic functions. Having a way to maintain heat in your building is an important part of managing the risk of burst pipes.

## **Freezing Temps in the Forecast**

No matter where your ministry is located, when the temperature drops, these four steps can reduce the likelihood of frozen pipes on your property.

#### **1. Set the Thermostat**

When outside temperatures dip below freezing, it's important to keep a building's temperature above 55 degrees. Even if no one will be using the building, maintaining a consistent temperature can keep pipes from freezing. If some areas of a building stay colder than the rest, prop doors open or take other steps to maintain heat in those areas.

#### **2. Leave Faucets on a Trickle**

When temperatures are especially frigid, leave faucets open to a steady drip or trickle. The constant flow will help prevent frozen pipes.

#### **3. Check the Property Regularly**

Burst pipes can cause greater damage in buildings that go unused for days at a time. During extremely cold weather, you may wish to check buildings more frequently than normal.

"Having two or three people who are essentially on call to check on your building can make a huge difference," offered Mize. "That way if someone is out of town or can't get to the property, you still have another person or two who can go make sure everything checks out and raise the alarm if they see something has gone wrong."

If you're concerned about the potential for freezing even after you've put safeguards in place, you can manually shut off the water supply for the entire building when a freeze alert is issued. Mize also emphasized the importance of knowing where the shut-off valve is in case of an emergency.

#### **4. Maximize the Reach of Warm Air**

Be aware of places in your building that might be more exposed to freezing temperatures. For example, if you have pipes above ceiling tiles, consider lifting some of the tiles to allow warm air to reach the pipes. Entryways and vestibules with exterior and interior doors are more exposed to freezing weather, especially in southern states. "I've found that a lot of burst pipes happen because water lines or the building's fire sprinkler system lines are in between an exterior door and an interior door," said Mize. "If you have an entryway like that, we often recommend keeping the interior doors propped open and removing some ceiling tiles so heat can reach the pipes in that area."

"It's easy to forget how disruptive water damage can be to ministry activities," said Mize. "If your pipes burst and cause significant flooding, your property might not be usable for an extended period of time." That's why a sense of urgency when it comes to prevention is so important. By taking proactive steps to protect your property, you can reduce the threat of winter's icy grip.