

CONSERVE WATER – WINTER CONSERVATION TIPS

Don't Let Cold Weather Catch You Unprepared! Although it doesn't happen too often here in Southeast Texas, once or twice a year we experience a hard enough freeze to cause water pipes to burst. Not only is it an inconvenience, but a burst water pipe can waste thousands of gallons of water before you even realize it has happened. However, you can cross that off your list of winter worries by taking a few simple precautions to prevent waste and conserve water.

Disconnect and drain outdoor hoses. Detaching a hose allows water to drain from the faucet. Otherwise, a single, hard overnight freeze can burst either the faucet or the pipe it's connected to.

Insulate pipes or faucets in unheated areas. If you have pipes in an attic, unheated garage or cold crawl space under the house, wrap the water pipes before temperatures plummet. Hardware or building supply stores will have good pipe insulating materials available.

Consider using electrical "heat tape". This tape runs a low voltage current along the length of the tape warming the pipe. It is very useful in attics and crawl spaces where an electrical outlet is readily accessible.

Seal off access doors, air vents and cracks. Winter winds whistling through overlooked openings can quickly freeze exposed water pipes.

Don't forget any water lines you may have running to the garden or livestock troughs. Be sure that these pipes get extra attention. Since we don't always pay attention to these pipes, it could be hours or days before you realize the pipe has burst. Inspect all your connections after any freeze.

Be sure to know the location of the master water shutoff. If a pipe bursts this valve turns it off, so find it now and be sure everyone in the family knows where it is and what it does. Also, it is a good idea to keep the plumber's telephone number handy. Write it down now before you need it in an emergency.

In severe cold weather, you may want to allow a faucet to drip a small continuous stream. Although this may seem to be wasting water, it is better to lose a few gallons per hour than hundreds of gallons per hour if the pipe bursts.

If you know where a freeze-up occurred and want to try thawing it yourself, do not under any circumstances use a torch with an open flame as this is a major fire hazard. Also,

overheating a single spot can burst the pipe and heating a soldered joint could cause it to leak or come completely apart.

The easiest tool to use for thawing pipes is a hair dryer. Wave the warm air back and forth along the pipe, not concentrated on one spot. If you don't have a hair dryer, you can wrap the frozen section with rags or towels and pour hot water over them. It's messy, but it works.

Remember, taking steps to prevent pipe freezes saves you time, inconvenience, and money, and prevents waste of a precious resource – Water.