

 West Lothian Council	Environmental Health		SUBJECT: Burst & Frozen Pipes
		Food Safety/Food Hygiene	NUMBER: PH12
ISSUED: 08/01/10		Health & Safety	
	✓	Public Health	KEYWORDS: BURST FROZEN WATER PIPES
STATUS: PUBLIC ADVICE		Pollution Control	
		Pest Control/Dog Warden	

Information Sheet PH12 Burst and Frozen Water Pipes

A burst water pipe can it can cause serious damage to your home's structure, electrical wiring, decoration and personal belongings. It is likely to take a long time to get over. Where this happens in flats, it can affect others too as water flows down into properties below.

Burst Pipe Emergency

As soon as you discover a burst pipe:

1. Turn off the water supply
 - Turn off the main stop tap. You should find this under the kitchen sink or where the service pipe enters your home. If this cannot be found, you may have to shut the water off at the 'Toby' (water supply valve in the street).
 - Drain the system by turning on all your cold taps.
2. Do what you can to collect and manage the leak. If water has been leaking through for some time and the ceilings are bulging be careful. The room may not be safe to enter.
 - If you notice the leak quickly you can catch dripping water in buckets.
 - Make a hole in the ceiling to let water out.
3. Turn off water heating systems
 - Switch off the central heating, immersion heater and any other water heating systems.
 - If the central heating uses solid fuel, let this die out.
 - Once water heating has shut down, turn on the hot taps to help drain the system.
4. Turn off the electrics
 - If water leaks near your electrics or electrical appliances, switch off the mains immediately. If it is wet, don't touch them!
5. Call a professional to repair the damage
 - Electrical wiring damaged by water can be very dangerous. You will need to call in a professional if this happens.
 - Find a reputable plumber to repair the burst or frozen pipe(s).

Frozen/

Frozen Pipe Emergency

A frozen pipe is also an emergency, because this will cause it to burst causing thawed water to come pouring from the break. As soon as you discover a frozen pipe:

1. Turn off the water supply, as above, and turn off the stopcock in your cold water tank if you have one. It's usually found in the attic or loft.
2. Beat the burst
 - Protect everything around the pipe that appears to be frozen to avoid damage if it bursts.
3. Thawing out
 - Open the tap nearest to the part of the pipe you think is frozen so the water can flow through when it has melted.
 - Thaw the ice in the pipe with a hot water bottle or hairdryer (taking care to keep it well away from any water), beginning from the tap end and working back toward the cold water tank. Never use a heat gun or blow torch.

Preventing Burst Pipes: Winter Care

It's always best to avoid problems if you can. Burst pipes and leaks can be complicated to fix and for outside pipes, repair work may also involve digging up your lawn, tarmac or paving.

You can avoid this kind of damage by preventing burst pipes and leaks in the first place. As frozen pipes often burst, winter care is the answer. Try the following care tips:

- Insulate your loft and the sides of your water tanks. Grants or subsidised work is available to most households. Contact West Lothian Housing Advice Shop, Bathgate on 0800 834 672 or online at <http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/downloadaddoc/1799563/1971542/1971558>
- Insulate all your pipes
- Open the loft trap door on very cold days to let heat in.
- If you're away for a while, spending winter somewhere warmer perhaps, then ask a friend or relative to check on your home and make sure pipes haven't burst or frozen.
- Change the washers on dripping taps because if they freeze they'll block the pipe. This will also save up to a litre of water a day and your money if it's a hot tap.
- In very cold weather the heating will need to be on low, or set to come on a couple of times a day, especially if you're going away. Most modern boilers have a frost protection thermostat, which turns on automatically if the temperature drops to a level that will cause your pipes to freeze.

Personal Check List for Emergency Preparations

It is a good idea to make some preparations, so you have everything you need to hand in an emergency.

1. Stop Cock Valve
 - Do you know where your stop cock (water valve) is?
 - Can you get to it?
 - Do you know which way is 'off'?
 - Does it close completely? (Some don't due to age or lack of use)

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2. Cold Water tank (where fitted)

- Do you know where your stop cock (water valve) is? (It's usually by the tank in the loft)
- Can you get to it?
- Do you know which way is 'off'?
- Does it close completely? (Some don't due to age or lack of use)

3. 'Toby' (street water valve)

- Do you know where your 'toby' (street water valve) is?
- Can you get to into it?
- Is it clear of debris?
- Do you need a 'toby key' to turn it and do you have access to one?

4. Beating the Burst

- Do you have waterproof sheeting and heavy duty tape available to protect electrical systems, furniture and carpets?

5. Containing and managing a leak

- If you have upstairs neighbours, do you know how to contact them in an emergency? If the property is rented, do you know who the landlord is? (Details should be available online at <https://www.landlordregistrationscotland.gov.uk>, but will not necessarily include a telephone number). Speak to your neighbours and exchange contact details.
- Do you have large containers or buckets to collect water from a leak
- Do you have a way of getting up to a ceiling below a leak, particularly in old buildings with high ceilings?
- Do you have something which you can use to make a hole in a ceiling where there is a leak? This is to prevent the weight of water making the ceiling collapse.

6. Heating Systems

- Do you know how to switch off your heating system?

7. Electrical System

- Do you know how to switch off your electricity supply or affected parts of it?

8. Tradesmen

- Do you have details of a reputable local plumber, electrician and decorator ?

9. Insurance

- Do you have home insurance which covers burst pipes?
- Do you have contents insurance which covers you against damage to items due to burst pipes?
- Have you considered insurance for your main water supply pipe (through the garden in individual homes)

What can West Lothian Council do about it?

Environmental Health will become involved if it receives a complaint about a property being affected by someone else's burst pipe. Although we will normally approach a property owner informally first, West Lothian Council has two formal options for getting a problem stopped.

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We can serve an Abatement Notice under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Failure to comply with an Abatement Notice is an offence and can result in:

- A Fixed Penalty of £150 per breach of the Abatement Notice;
- Emergency works to deal with the problem for which the property owner will be billed; and / or
- A report to the Procurator Fiscal, which can result in a fine of up to £40,000 if found guilty.

In situations where a number of burst pipe problems arise at the same time, priority will be given to those affecting senior citizens, the ill or those with young children living in the property.

More Information

For further information and advice, contact Environmental Health at County Buildings, High Street, Linlithgow, EH49 7EZ. Telephone 01506 282500, Fax 01506 282448, or send us an email on environmentalhealth@westlothian.gov.uk.