



Orange Water and Sewer Authority

A public, non-profit agency providing water, sewer and reclaimed water services to the Carrboro-Chapel Hill community.

PROTECTING WATER PIPES FROM FREEZING

Let one or more cold water faucets drip slowly to keep water moving and reduce the potential for freezing. **A slow drip from a faucet is better than major water loss and property damage from frozen (burst) pipes.**

If you have water pipes or hoses in unheated areas (such as a crawlspace, attic, basement, utility room/shed or outdoors), insulating the pipes is prudent, especially if they are cold water pipes. For example, pipes that hold water for a sprinkler fire protection system may need to be insulated if they are in an unheated attic.

Pipes in an unheated area can be protected by wrapping them with electrical heating tape (available at supply stores). However, heating tape should be installed first if pipes are insulated.

If you have pipes inside or close to an exterior wall (such as pipes that supply water to a sink), you can help keep the pipes warm by opening the cabinet if there is one under the sink.

Remove and drain hoses from outdoor spigots. If there is a cut off valve specifically for an outdoor spigot, turn the valve to the off position, open the spigot and drain any water remaining in the spigot and pipe “downstream” of the shut-off valve.

If you have water pipes in an unheated area such as a shed or garage and there is a shut-off valve for those pipes, turn off the valve and drain the water from the pipes by opening the faucet/spigot.

Identify and mark the location of shut-off valves in your plumbing system so you can turn off the water before and during a repair if water freezes in a pipe and the pipe then bursts.

For more information on shut-off valves, please see [Shut-off valves can save water, time and dollars](#) on the Maintenance page of our Customer Care website section.

If your house or business has an unheated basement or crawlspace including water pipes, you may close some of the foundation vents to help keep out cold air. **HOWEVER, IF THE BASEMENT OR CRAWLSPACE HAS A FURNACE THAT USES NATURAL GAS OR HEATING OIL, AND/OR A WATER HEATER THAT USES NATURAL GAS, PLEASE CHECK WITH THE COMPANY THAT INSTALLED OR MAINTAINS THEM**

ABOUT THE NEED TO MAINTAIN AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF AIR. It is necessary to resolve any safety questions before closing all foundation vents.

IF A HOME OR BUSINESS IS OR WILL BE WITHOUT HEAT WHILE VACANT, DUE TO A POWER OUTAGE, etc., you can do the following to drain water out of the pipes and fixtures to protect them from freezing:

1. If your plumbing system has a shut-off valve, use it to turn the water OFF. The shut-off valve may be in the basement, crawlspace, or a utility room. Houses, etc. built on concrete slabs with no crawlspace or basement may have a shut-off valve in a closet near the front of the building.

If your plumbing system does not have a shut-off valve, you can have OWASA shut off the water at our meter for a fee, or a plumber can do so. Turning off the water at the meter without the proper tool can damage the meter assembly, so shutting off water at the OWASA meter should be done by someone who can do so properly.

2. Post a large reminder or notice that the water is OFF in a very visible place, such as the foyer, living room, main hallway, kitchen, etc. so that you and others who enter the house/building later can know that the water is off.
3. Open all faucets and spigots, including those in showers and bathtubs, to drain water out of the pipes to the extent practical.

The water will slowly drain out from the lowest faucets, which may be an outside spigot, in the basement near a laundry washer-dryer area, or in a bathtub in a house which was built on a concrete slab without a basement.

Please note: The water heater may also be drained of water if its power/fuel source is off, but it is very important to know how to do so safely and to prevent damage to heating elements. If you are not familiar with this procedure, we suggest not draining the heater or getting professional assistance.

4. Leave the faucets and spigots open to drain while the water is OFF. Some water will stay in these pipes and may freeze, but draining the plumbing system will reduce the potential for freezing and damage.
5. Remove the hoses from the spigots or faucets that supply water to your clothes washer and open these faucets. (NOTE: Before you remove the hoses, put a bucket or similar container in place to catch the water that will drain from these spigots.)
6. Flush all toilets at least twice to drain as much water out of the toilet tanks and bowls as YOU can.
7. When the heat is restored, and you are ready to turn the water back on:

- close the faucets and spigots at tubs, sinks, showers, etc.
- reconnect the clothes washer hoses to the correct faucets, and
- then turn the water back ON by opening the shut-off valve for the plumbing system or arrange to have water turned on at the OWASA meter. Water should then begin flowing to refill the toilets.
- If any water pipes have been damaged, they will leak and could cause property damage, so listen carefully for flowing water after the toilet tanks fill. (Filling a toilet tank may take about 60 seconds.)
- If you hear water flowing after the toilets are full, shut the water OFF and look thoroughly to find any water leaks/damage. If you find leak(s), have them repaired by a licensed plumber or other qualified person.

For more information: OWASA Public Affairs, 919-537-4267 or webmaster@owasa.org.

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