



Eastsound Water Users Association

Helpful Hints for WINTER

Winter blizzards, deep ground frost, and night time temperatures dropping into the teens and lower are more frequently seen on the evening news than actually experienced on Orcas Island. However many winters bring at least one significant cold front to our island. At that time there are risks of freezing pipes and other related water system challenges. Many frozen or burst pipes can be avoided with a little forethought and planning prior to a cold snap. This is certainly a situation where an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Some recommendations to prevent mishaps include:

- Insulate exposed pipes inexpensively with foam sleeves. This will retard freezing, but be aware an extended cold snap might still freeze such pipes.
- Make sure your exterior crawl spaces are properly sealed; doors and other openings are closed or covered.
- Make sure that heat registers are not blocked.
- In specific areas where you have previously had freeze up problems, consider wrapping pipes with electric heat tapes. Don't keep these tapes plugged in all the time; just plug them in during the threatening cold snaps. You can also consider temperature sensitive plugs for your heat-tapes. They automatically turn on when the temperature is below freezing.
- Keep interior doors open to rooms with water pipes so heat can circulate well.
- Keeping the water in your pipes moving can also substantially reduce freeze ups. A *slow drip* is enough to prevent many freeze-ups. Please don't leave water running in seasonally occupied dwellings though!
- Should you have a pipe break/freeze you'll want to be able to shut down the water as quickly as possible. Identify and label where your water system shut offs are. Most homes have some type of master shut-off valve right where the water enters the building. These can often be in crawl spaces and sometimes be challenging to reach.
- If you're a seasonal resident to the island, or are away from your home for more than a week, seriously consider turning off your master shut-off valve and de-energize your hot water heater. You can also request EWUA staff to shut off your meter valve.
- Do not attempt to thaw frozen pipes with propane or MAPP gas torches. This is a significant fire hazard, and runs the risk of further damaging pipe fittings. Try blow dryers, but never leave them unattended, and always make sure the water main is shut down prior to thawing a pipe.
- The San Juan Department of Emergency Management recommends that every household maintain a store of drinking water for emergencies. With lessons learned during recent hurricanes, they now recommend storing a week's worth of drinking water, with a minimum allotment of one gallon per person per day. Don't forget supplies for your pets too. San Juan Emergency Management has many more helpful tips on their web site at <http://www.sanjuandem.net/>