

News Release

Leavenworth Water Department

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FROZEN PIPES CAN BE COSTLY FOR WATER CUSTOMERS

LEAVENWORTH, KS – As we enter into the winter season over the next several weeks, outside temperatures will likely drop well below freezing until the onset of spring. Each year beginning in December, the Leavenworth Water Department receives numerous calls from customers who report that they do not have water. The Water Department responds as quickly as possible to all such inquiries. The vast majority of these calls are due to frozen private water pipes located between the Water Department's water-service meter and the customers' plumbing fixtures in their house or place of business. When water freezes, it expands. A pipe filled with water that is frozen will burst the pipe resulting in costly repairs and cleanup for water customers. This is because ice is about 8 to 9 percent less dense than liquid water. In other word, ice occupies a larger space than an equal mass of water.

Often, broken pipes are not discovered until the air temperature rises above freezing and the thaw begins. Any breaks in private water lines due to cold temperatures should be repaired by a licensed plumber. If a water meter or service line from the water main to the meter pit freezes, the Water Department will repair or replace the meter or line at no cost to the customer.

Preventing Pipes from Freezing

Prudent precautions can be taken to avoid water line problems. For example:

- Indoor water lines located next to an exterior wall are susceptible to freezing. Commonly, these pipes can be accessed through a kitchen or bathroom cabinet door (beneath a sink). Leaving these cabinet doors open when outdoor temperatures are well below freezing will allow warm air to circulate around the pipes to keep them from freezing. Allowing a small amount of water to flow from the plumbing fixtures (kitchen or bathroom sink) will also prevent them from freezing. The flowing water may help to melt an existing partial blockage.
- Some supply lines from the meter pit to the house or business enter the building through an unheated or poorly insulated basement or crawl space. These main lines are susceptible to freezing, which can be prevented by installing heat tape and insulation

sleeve around the pipe, improving the basement or crawlspace insulation, ensuring that all exterior windows and doors are closed, and blocking all openings where cold air can access the basement or crawl space. Heat tape and insulation sleeves should be installed in strict accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

- The normal frost depth (or depth from the ground surface at which the ground will freeze) in the Leavenworth area is about three feet. This means that buried water service lines into houses and businesses should be at least 3½ feet below the ground surface to prevent the line from freezing. If a water line freezes in the soil between the meter and house, the only cost-effective remedy is to bury the line deeper.

Thawing a Frozen Pipe

Before you start the thawing process, open all water taps on the frozen line to allow water, steam or pressure to escape. Open the affected faucets all the way and open other hot water faucets in the house. When the water is flowing in the affected pipe, close all the faucets to a trickle. Do not close the affected faucets until the pipe is completely thawed and the water is flowing freely.

How you heat the pipe depends upon the type of pipe and the location. But in all cases start nearest the tap and work outward. Never heat a pipe with direct flame or boiling water. Heating a pipe too quickly can cause the pipe to burst and may result in personal injury and water damage. A direct flame can also cause a fire. Instead, use a hair dryer or heat lamp.

What to Do if You Have a Broken Pipe

First, turn off the main water supply. This will prevent the water from flowing out of the pipe at the break. The shut-off valve is normally located where the water line enters the house. If you do not have or cannot find a shut-off valve, call the Water Department.

Second, after the shut-off valve is closed, open the water taps in the house, particularly the lower taps, to allow the water to gravity drain from the pipes.

Third, call a plumber to replace the section of broken pipe and restore water pressure in the lines.

Absentee Owner

Homeowners who plan to be away from their house for an extended period of time can have their water service suspended by the Water Department until they return. After the main service valve is shut off by the Water Department, the homeowner can gravity-drain their water lines to prevent freezing.

For more information about the Water Department, see our web site at www.lvnwater.com or call the Water Department at 913-682-1513.