



Department of Public Works
Milwaukee Water Works

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Cold Weather Prep: Prevent Water Pipes and Water Meters from Freezing

Prevention is the key to making sure water pipes and water meters do not freeze during prolonged cold temperatures. The Milwaukee Water Works has tips for customers (in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)) to prevent freeze-up in their homes and businesses. Water pipes and the water meter can freeze within hours if exposed to cold air. Frozen pipes and water meters stop water service and can be expensive to repair or replace. Find consumer tip sheets at Milwaukee.gov/water.

Property owners are responsible for protecting both water pipes and the water meter from damage. Preventing them from freezing is easier than trying to thaw them.

Owners of vacant residential and commercial property should check that pipes and water meters are exposed to heat and circulating air in the building and not closed off behind cabinets and doors. If there is no heat in the building, contact the water utility to arrange to have the water shut off to the building. Please call the Milwaukee Water Works Customer Service Center, (414) 286-2830, Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. After 5:00 p.m. on weekdays, and at any time during weekends, please call the Milwaukee Water Works Control Center, (414) 286-3710. The Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) number is (414) 286-8801.

How to Prevent Water Pipes and Water Meters from Freezing

- Tightly close doors and windows to the outside. Fill cracks in walls and around windows.
- Eliminate cold drafts near water pipes and the water meter.
- Install storm windows on basement windows.
- Eliminate drafts from crawl spaces.
- Before freezing temperatures set in, turn off the water to garden hose connections at an interior valve and drain the exposed piping.
- Wrap pipes with insulation or heat tape.
- It is colder near the floor and along the block wall of a basement than at the ceiling, so make sure warm air is allowed to circulate around water pipes and the water meter. The pipes most likely to freeze are nearest a wall, door, window, and along the floor.
- Open the doors to the rooms where the pipes and water meter are located to allow warm air to circulate around them.
- If your kitchen or bathroom sink is located against an outside wall, insulate the wall to prevent pipes from freezing.

Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building, 841 N. Broadway, Suite 409, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202
Phone (414) 286-2801 ♦ Fax (414) 286-2672 ♦ www.milwaukee.gov/water
American Water Works Association, Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies,
Water Research Foundation



- Open the cabinet doors below sinks to allow warm air to circulate around the pipes.
- Flowing water can break up ice as it forms inside pipes. Turn on the water periodically at all faucets that are exposed to cold air when outdoor temperatures remain below freezing for several days. It costs less to run water from all faucets occasionally than to repair a frozen or burst pipe.
- If the water meter is in an outdoor pit, check to see that the pit cover fits properly and there are no cracks into which cold wind could blow. The pipes, valves, and the water meter inside such pits should not touch the concrete walls.

How to Thaw Frozen Water Pipes and a Water Meter

Water pipes are frozen if little or no water comes from the faucets when you turn them on.

- Open a faucet located near the frozen pipe or water meter to release any vapor from the melting ice so you will see when the water starts flowing again.
- Begin warming the pipes nearest the faucet and work toward the frozen section or the frozen water meter.
- Blow warm air on the pipe or water meter using a hair dryer. Do not leave the hair dryer unattended or allow it to overheat.
- Never use a blowtorch or open flame to warm pipes or a water meter. This is a fire hazard that could cause an explosion.
- Once water starts flowing again, open a nearby faucet to allow a pencil width-sized stream of water to flow from the faucet until heat is restored to the area. Please remember that your water account will be charged for all water used.
- Eliminate cold drafts and allow warm air to circulate around the pipes and the water meter to prevent them from freezing again.

If you suspect damage to your water pipes, please call a licensed plumber for assistance.

If you suspect a frozen water meter or damage to the water meter, please call the Milwaukee Water Works Meter Services Division, Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., (414) 286-8000. On weekdays after 7:30 p.m., on Saturday after 4:30 p.m., and at any time on Sunday, please call the Milwaukee Water Works Control Center, (414) 286-3710.

TDD number (414) 286-8801

The Milwaukee Water Works is recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a leader in providing pure, high quality drinking water and for monitoring water quality to make sure it is healthful. The City of Milwaukee-owned utility treats Lake Michigan water with a multiple-step process including ozone disinfection and biological filtration. These processes remove illness-causing microorganisms and contaminants, leaving only delicious water.

The Milwaukee Water Works provides drinking water service to all or part of these communities: Brown Deer, Butler, Franklin, Greendale, Greenfield, Hales Corners, Menomonee Falls, Mequon, Milwaukee, New Berlin, Shorewood, St. Francis, Thiensville, Wauwatosa, West Allis, and West Milwaukee.

