



Cold Weather Precautions

INTRODUCTION

Weather extremes are becoming more common. Adverse weather such as snow and sub-zero temperatures can be a major hazard to all types of businesses. Water damage caused by a simple burst pipe following a hard freeze can damage plant and machinery, ruin stock and bring production to a grinding halt resulting in interruption to the business and possible loss of customers.

The potential for long term damage to the business should not be underestimated. The weather should be an issue of the greatest concern for those charged with looking after the welfare and viability of an organisation.

PROACTIVE ACTION NOW IS BETTER THAN REACTIVE ACTION WHEN IT'S TOO LATE

Most of the guidelines provided in this section are little more than common sense and good business practice, yet many losses each year are caused by failure to implement these simple measures.

PRECAUTIONS

- Regularly attend to all areas of your building which might be affected by severe weather.
- External plant, particularly water tanks, sprinkler installations and pump houses need to be inspected, with specific checks on condition of any lagging or trace heating provided to these installations.
- Where necessary snow clearance and gritting of pathways, car parks and yard areas should be undertaken to ensure safe entry by employees, customers, suppliers and visitors - see notes below.
- Check that external lighting to yards, loading bays and means of access is sufficient, so allowing for safe working or access.
- Locate and record on a plan all pipe work, tanks, valves and stopcocks including the main stopcock and main electrical switches and boiler controls and ensure they all operate correctly. Importantly, make sure that instructions for their use in an emergency are prepared. Ensure that all keyholders have copies of the plan and are familiar with the operation of all controls.
- Have all water and central heating systems checked and tested periodically by a qualified plumber/heating engineer.
- Make sure all pipes are protected from freezing by taking the following simple measures:
 - Install at least 25mm thick, good quality, non-combustible, securely fixed lagging to pipes to resist overnight 'snap frosts'.
 - Heating either the entire premises or specific vulnerable areas. Leave heating on when freezing conditions are predicted and when premises are shut down for weekends or longer periods, particularly during holiday periods. Where frost-stats are not installed, heating should maintain a constant temperature of at least 5°C.
 - Consider the installation of trace heating (electrical heating tapes) on pipes remote from heated areas in roof spaces and outside buildings.
 - Simple and inexpensive automatic water control valves can be used to detect bursts or exceptional flows and act to automatically cut off the mains water supply.
 - Wherever practical, drain down tanks and pipes in vulnerable areas when not in use.
 - Install immersion heaters in storage tanks.
 - Isolate and drain down water systems whenever buildings are left unoccupied or shut down without any form of heating.
 - Sprinkler installations - unless your system is specifically designed as an alternate or dry pipe system it is vital that areas protected by sprinklers are heated to 5°C.
- Electricity supplies may fail - consider installation of an emergency generator.



FROZEN AND BURST PIPES: EMERGENCY ACTION

IF PIPES FREEZE

- Isolate the frozen pipe by closing the stopcock or feed from the mains or tank.
- Water leakage is possible so protect wiring, machinery or stock in the immediate vicinity.
- Open the tap nearest to the frozen section.
- Use a gradual heat source such as a hot water bottle or hair dryer against the pipe or raise the temperature of the surrounding area by space heating.
- Do not heat by blow lamp, electric hot air gun or similar high output heating units as sudden application of heat will cause the pipe to burst.
- **Remember, never use a naked flame.**

IF PIPES BURST

- Isolate the mains water supply at the stopcock.
- Switch off the electrical supply into the building or to the affected area.
- Open doors and any internal or external drains to allow water to run away freely.
- Raise as much property as possible from wet areas of floors or beneath burst to allow the drying out process to begin.
- Call an emergency plumber

EMERGENCY PLANNING

There is always the danger of unforeseen incidents. Therefore, every business should have an emergency plan. This will be a series of contingency measures designed to restore normal operations as quickly as possible. Every plan should include the following key elements:

- Ensure early detection by daily inspection of the premises particularly during shutdown periods.
- Pre-plan the best methods of drying out and clearing the premises.
- Compile a list of emergency telephone numbers: Insurance Broker; Plumber; Builder/Roofing Contractor; Drainage Contractor; Power Generator and Pumps provider. Provide a copy to all keyholders and ensure that these details are kept off-site.
- Develop a full disaster recovery and business continuity plan to minimise any interruption to your business.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Water Control Valve www.floodcheck.co.uk

Weather Forecasts/Warnings www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/uk; www.bbc.co.uk/weather; www.accuweather.com/ukie