



Media Release

Port Colborne Residents reminded to take steps to prevent Frozen Water Pipes & Water Meters

For Immediate Release

Port Colborne, Ont. (January 4, 2018) - Environment Canada has issued an extreme cold warning beginning later this evening (January, 4, 2018), extending into Saturday, January 6, 2018. The City and local plumbers have already received phone calls from residents and businesses who are experiencing frozen plumbing or frozen water meters, and expect that many more properties could be affected over the next few days.

The City of Port Colborne is reminding residents to take steps to prevent drinking water pipes in their property from freezing.

To avoid frozen water pipes in your home, consider the following suggestions:

- Open kitchen, bathroom and laundry cabinet doors to allow warm air to circulate around plumbing.
- Outdoor faucets are the first to freeze. Disconnect, drain, and shut off any outdoor hoses and faucets.
- Insulate pipes most prone to freezing, especially near outside walls and in crawl spaces, attic and garage, with a pipe sleeve.
- If your pipes are prone to freezing, consider contacting a plumber for advice on how best to protect your home.
- Leave a tap open enough for a pencil-thin stream of flowing water, so there is some movement of water in pipes that might be vulnerable to freezing.
- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage.

If your pipes are already frozen, consider the following steps to thaw them:

- If you have a poorly insulated crawlspace, the frozen pipe may be in this area.
- Turn on a tap in the lowest point in the house (i.e. the cold water faucet in the basement).

- Use a blow dryer to warm the suspected frozen pipe for one to two hours. Check the blow dryer regularly to ensure it does not overheat.
- Port Colborne Fire & Emergency Services does not advise the use of an open flame (i.e. blow torch, lighter) to thaw pipes, unless done by a professional who knows what safety procedures are required. Additionally, the use of welding equipment (to heat up pipes) adds additional hazards when attempting to thaw frozen pipes as the heat being radiated through the pipes can cause fires within a building. There have been cases in Niagara where this has caused significant damage to homes.
- Place a warm towel or rag around the suspected frozen pipe.
- Depending on the outside temperature and the extent of freezing within the pipe, the thawing process could take between one and six hours.

Note that the City of Port Colborne is responsible for frozen water lines from the property line to the water main, while **property owners are responsible for the water line from the property line to the building, and for all internal plumbing.**

To learn more about frozen water pipes, visit:

http://portcolborne.ca/page/frozen_water_service

Another plumbing component that could be affected in cold weather that property owners don't often think about is the water meter. While the water meter is owned by the City, the Water Bylaw (3151/22/95) states that it is the property owner's responsibility to protect the water meter from freezing. Residential sized meters have a backing plate, called a frost plate, which is designed to burst should the meter freeze. This plate not only prevents damage to the main body of the meter should it freeze, but prevents the plumbing attached to the meter from bursting.

To avoid a frozen water meter, consider the suggestions Inspect your water meter (usually located near the main building water shut off inside the home – usually in a basement or a crawlspace) to ensure the area is above 8°C.

- If the meter is in a closed in area in the basement (i.e. cold cellar, closet, behind a panel) leave the door/panel open to allow warm air to circulate around the meter.
- If the meter is installed close to an outside basement wall, consider installing a piece of foam board between the meter and the wall – cold air can radiate from the wall and cause the meter to freeze.
- Meters in crawlspaces or unheated areas, such as garages, require special protection. Ensure the meter is well insulated, or consider installing freeze protection cable, available at hardware stores, along the water line and the meter to ensure the plumbing and the meter does not freeze in the crawlspace.

If your meter has frozen and the frost plate or the meter has burst, property owners should do the following:

- Turn off the water at the building shut off valve immediately before the water meter to stop further flooding of the basement or crawlspace. If the building shut off valve isn't functional, contact the Engineering and Operations Department at 905-835-5079 to have the water shut off at the property line.
- Once the water has been shut off and Engineering and Operations has been contacted, property owners have two options to repair the burst frost plate:
 - Property owners, or their plumber, can pick up a frost plate repair kit at the Engineering and Operations Centre, located at 1 Killaly Street West, between 8:00 am - 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday, and repair the meter themselves, and then contact the City to come out to inspect and re-seal the meter. The property owner will receive an invoice for the frost plate repair kit (approximately \$25), and if they had a plumber repair the frost plate, pay the plumber's invoice.
 - Request that City staff repair the water meter. The property owner would be invoiced for frost plate repair kit and will be invoiced for the staff time required to complete the repair. Note that City staff will not enter confined crawlspaces, nor pump water out of crawlspaces or basements to facilitate repairs. In some cases, the homeowner may have to retain a plumber.
 - Note that the repair costs for emergency repairs (between 4pm and 8am, Monday to Friday, and all day Saturday and Sunday) will be invoiced at afterhours emergency call out rates.
- In some cases, the meter itself freezes and bursts. In these instances, the homeowner still has two options to replace the meter; however, the cost for a replacement meter is much higher than the cost for a frost plate, and the property owner will be billed for the actual cost of the replacement water meter – beginning at approximately \$400.

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For more information about Frozen Water Services, residents are asked to call 905-835-5079 or visit http://portcolborne.ca/page/frozen_water_service.

Media Inquiries are to be directed to:
Michelle Cuthbert
Corporate Communications Officer
michellecuthbert@portcolborne.ca
905-835-2901 ext. 540