

CORPORATE POLICY AND PROCEDURE



By-law No. 6306/132/15

Effective Date: November 23, 2015

DEPARTMENT: Engineering/Operations
SECTION: Operations Division
SUBJECT: Revised Frozen Water Service Pipes Policy (to replace bylaw
6173/139/14, which endorsed the original Frozen Service Pipe
Policy)

POLICY STATEMENT The City of Port Colborne Operations Division will provide operational services for the thawing of frozen Municipal Water Service Pipes (defined below) to properties located in the Urban Area that are connected to the Municipal Water Works (defined below).

PURPOSE The purpose of the Frozen Water Service Pipes Policy is to regulate and administer the fees and costs associated with property owner requests for the provision of the service provided by the City, to minimize costs and disruption to the properties impacted by a frozen water service pipe, and to mitigate any future claims and disputes arising from the provision of the service. The regulations required to thaw a frozen water service now require a minimum crew of three to four workers, vehicles, equipment and a thawing machine. The cost to provide this service could be extensive to the property owner and will be charged back at actual cost. Therefore, from a property owner's cost perspective, the most efficient way to proceed is to have the property owner call a plumber from the City's "Frozen Service Plumbers List" to determine the freeze location.

SCOPE The City of Port Colborne has the responsibility for the orderly control and maintenance of the City's Municipal Water Works. This involves regular maintenance of the Water Works including the watermain distribution pipes and appurtenances by accepted Engineering Practice, and in accordance with the Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002 and associated regulations,

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which will ensure that the potable water supply is transmitted in a safe and effective manner to properties in the municipality.

This responsibility does not include the Building Water Service Pipe (defined below).

RESPONSIBILITY

The City Operations Division is responsible for receiving calls from property owners at the Frozen Service Hotline (905-834-6627), and will ensure callers are provided with detailed information regarding this Policy so that they understand their role in remediating their frozen water service pipes. Property owners will be referred to the City's website to access more information regarding this Policy, or to City Hall where hard copy information is available.

Messages left on the Frozen Service Hotline voice mail system will be returned within 24 hours of being received.

The Corporate Services Department is responsible for issuing reimbursements and for any water billing adjustments.

DEFINITIONS

Building Water Service Pipe – Pipes that convey potable water to a building or premises from the Municipal Water Works. Located entirely on private property, the operation, maintenance, repair and replacement of this pipe is the sole responsibility of the owner of the property on which it is located and is considered plumbing under the Ontario Building Code

Frozen Service Plumbers List – A list of plumbers that have been prequalified through an Expression of Interest (EOI) process and have demonstrated that they possess the proper equipment and procedures to thaw frozen water services from within a property. These plumbers have been provided with

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the Policy requirements, City expectations and the standard forms.

Municipal Water Service Pipe – The pipe portion of the service that extends from the watermain up to and including the curb stop (property line). This portion is part of the Municipal Water Works.

Municipal Water Works – The Port Colborne Water Distribution System, as defined by Ontario Regulation 170/03, includes the watermains, appurtenances and service pipes to the property line, and may only be maintained, repaired or replaced under the City's authority.

Property owner – individual(s) or corporation that owns the property. In the case of a landlord-tenant situation, only the landlord can request the City's assistance.

A. Administrative Procedures

To support the Frozen Water Service Pipes Policy, the City ensures the following:

1. The City will annually prepare and make available a "Frozen Service Plumbers List" by December 1st of each calendar year, to assist property owners who experience a frozen service. Plumbers are approved based on their ability to assist property owners with frozen services (i.e. possessing equipment to thaw service lines.)
2. Plumbers/plumbing companies added to the "Frozen Service Plumbers List" are provided with documentation outlining:
 - a. Code of conduct
 - b. Frozen Water Service Pipes Policy
 - c. City's expectations re: equipment, degree of effort
 - d. Procedure for notifying City of suspected freeze on City side
 - e. Procedure for reimbursement for City-side freezes

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3. When called, plumbers from the List have been provided with a standard form to use when responding to property owner requests for service. The form will, at a minimum, include the following information:

- Date
- Name and service address
- Verification of City or private side frozen

The City will receive all plumber invoice requests for reimbursement.

4. A dedicated "Frozen Service Hotline" (905-834-6627), equipped with voice mail for afterhours calls, directs callers to the City's website for more information, and provides callers with an opportunity to leave their information for Staff to collect the following day. Should the volume of calls regarding frozen services increase, the "hotline" may be staffed for extended hours as designated by the Director of Engineering and Operations.
5. A frozen services database will be maintained to track and communicate frozen service status. Information from property owners who call and are experiencing a suspected frozen service will be entered into the database. Additionally, property owners with internet access (smartphone, tablet, computer) will be able to enter their information into the database via an on-line web portal.
6. A "Frozen Service List" will be created and updated daily when calls are received. Properties will be attended in the order they are received; once the property owner calls back to confirm a plumber from the City's "Frozen Service Plumbers List" has attended the property and has identified the freeze as being in the Municipal Water Service Pipe.

a. Priority List

Three categories of 'priorities' have been created. A property owner can advance and be moved to the "Priority List" if the property qualifies as one of the following priorities:

- i. Property listed on the Critical Water Users List (includes institutions and industries which use water in their process and home dialysis patients identified by Niagara Health System);

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- ii. Property contains a business(es) requiring water for operation (i.e. restaurants, stores with water cooled equipment), or;
- iii. Property with hot water heating system.

B. External Communications

To ensure property owners receive adequate information before, during and after a frozen water service occurs at their property Policy information is available on the City's website or in hard copy at City Hall and at other City-owned facilities.

For those properties where the City was required to thaw out the Building Water Service Pipe, an information letter will be provided to the property owner by the on-site City staff, detailing the steps that must be followed to ensure the line doesn't refreeze, and details the compensation process (see "Costs and Reimbursements" below). Additionally, the City will send a letter to the property owner recommending that they remediate (lower, insulate or otherwise protect) the Building Water Service Pipe to prevent future freezes.

C. Frozen Water Service Pipe Remediation Procedures

Upon the request and notification from property owners that an interruption in water supply has occurred at a property:

1. The property owner's address and contact information will be recorded and entered into the frozen services database, placing the property on the "Frozen Service List"
2. The property owner will be advised to either pick up a package, detailing their responsibilities, at City Hall or access the package via the City's website, and will be provided with the City's "Frozen Service Plumbers List" (verbally, hard copy or via the City's website). They will be advised to select and call a plumber from the list so that the plumber can attend their property and rule out frozen internal plumbing and determine if the frozen water service is on the Municipal Water Service Pipe or the Building Water Service Pipe.
3. If it is determined that the problem is due to frozen internal plumbing or in the Building Water Service Pipe, the property owner, in most cases, will have the

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plumber correct the problem and there will be no further action required by the City. The property owner must notify the Operations Department that their problem has been resolved.

4. If the plumber and/or property owner cannot correct the problem or it is found to be in the Municipal Water Service Pipe, the property owner must notify the City of the plumber's findings so that they can be placed in the queue on the "Frozen Service List" and Operations Staff and/or a City contractor will be dispatched once the property moves to the top of the queue. The Operations Department will determine if the property falls under any of the three priority categories by checking the address against the Critical Water Users List and asking the property owner if the property is heated with hot water heat, or if it serves a business that relies on water for operation. If any of these three criteria are met, the property will move to the next place on the "priority list".
5. The property owner will be advised that they will be billed actual cost for the City staff and equipment dispatched to their property if the problem is deemed to be on the Building Water Service Pipe and/or due to internal plumbing issues.
6. If the problem is confirmed by the City to be in the Municipal Water Service Pipe, the plumber will be instructed to submit the invoice to the City.

D. Alternate Water Supplies

1. House-to-house Connections

The City does not encourage nor endorse the practice of "house-to-house" connections, and will not perform such a connection in the event of a frozen water service. Should residents wish to connect to their neighbour to assist with the supply of water, the "donor" and "receiver" properties do so of their own accord and at their own risk.

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2. Potable Water

Properties affected by frozen water services are responsible for acquiring potable water for consumption and cooking purposes. The City will reimburse the cost for purchasing potable water (i.e. bottled water) for properties that are registered on the "Frozen Service List".

In order to receive compensation, property owners must keep their receipts for water purchases, and the receipts must be dated and the item purchased clearly marked as water. Original receipts are to be clearly labelled with the property owner's address and submitted to City Hall within 30 days of the water being restored to the property. The actual cost of water purchased will be credited to the property owner's water bill to a maximum of \$10.00 per week that the service is frozen.

E. Costs and Reimbursements

The City, upon investigation of any claim for reimbursement, shall determine the validity of the claim and shall be the sole arbiter in determining reimbursement, taking into account all factors related to the claim. Claims for reimbursement for those conditions not directly related to a frozen water service pipe, such as water system malfunction, breakage, major storms, power outages or any other system malfunctions shall not be considered for reimbursement, and shall be the sole responsibility of the property owner.

The City will cover costs associated with thawing, and reimburse property owners for running their water to prevent re-freezing as detailed below:

1. Frozen Service - City Side (Municipal Water Service Pipe)

a. Costs

Should it be determined by the plumber from the City's "Frozen Service Plumbers List" that the frozen water service has occurred in the Municipal Water Service Pipe, the plumber will submit an invoice and the completed form to the City.

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b. Water Bills

Properties that have experienced a freeze in the Municipal Water Service Pipe may be instructed to run their water in order to prevent the line from re-freezing. The City will inform the property owner when it is safe to stop running the water. In this situation, property owners shall be compensated for the water used as follows:

- Consumption billing (water and wastewater) shall be based on 2 year average of same period for the specific property
- Consumption billing (water and wastewater) shall be adjusted for the number of days frozen
e.g. For a 90 day period where the service is frozen for 20 days, the 2 year average consumption was 20 m³ and the current reading shows 50 m³. The billing will be prorated 70/90 days times 20 m³. The 30 m³ of additional consumption is written off as refunds/credits in addition to the number of days frozen.

c. Prevention of Freezing

It is the City's practice to remediate Municipal Water Service Pipes that are prone to freezing. However, in the case where remediation has not occurred, the City shall advise the property owner when to start and when to stop running their taps to prevent the Municipal Water Service Pipe from freezing; billing shall be adjusted for these customers as described above.

2. Frozen Service - Private Side (Building Water Service Pipe)

a. Costs

Should the City determine that the freeze was not on the Municipal Water Service Pipe, but was in the Building Water Service Pipe, the plumber shall bill the property owner for the work that was completed and the property owner shall be responsible for all costs associated with thawing the Building Water Service Pipe. Additionally, the property owner shall be responsible for the City's costs, as described below:

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- The costs for the thawing of a Building Water Service Pipe by the City shall be invoiced at actual costs for either regular hours or after hours.

b. Reimbursements

Once a Building Water Service Pipe has been thawed by either a plumber from the City's "Frozen Service Plumbers List" or by the City, the property owner may be advised to run the water in order to prevent the line from re-freezing. Compensation for the water used shall be as follows:

- In the case of a first (1st) time freeze on the Building Water Service Pipe (private side), the bill shall be adjusted to average consumption as described in section 1.
- No reimbursements for subsequent private side freezes (i.e. due to failure to lower Building Water Service Pipe).

In the case where the City has remediated the Municipal Water Service Pipe and has recommended that the property owner remediate their Building Water Service Pipe as well, and the property owner does not remediate the private side pipe:

- No reimbursements for private side freezes.

3. No Frozen Service

While the City recognizes that some residents may decide to run their water to prevent freezing either due to a past history of frozen internal plumbing, frozen Building Water Service Pipe or just as a precautionary measure to avoid potential inconvenience:

- There shall be no reimbursement for running water to prevent freezing and potential inconvenience.

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4. House-to-house Connections

As previously stated, the City does not recommend this approach.

- No reimbursements for this situation.
- If neighbours agree to provide water between themselves, (not recommended) the City can assist in providing consumption figures to the “donor” and “receiver” properties to determine usage.

5. Fixed Service Cost

There shall be no reimbursement of the fixed water/sewer charges in any instance.

6. Frozen Plumbing

Costs associated with thawing frozen internal plumbing (i.e. plumber fees for thawing frozen pipes in a crawlspace, replacing/repairing a frozen water meter, thawing frozen pipes in any other internal plumbing location), damage costs from frozen internal plumbing, or running water to avoiding frozen plumbing are the sole responsibility of the property owner.

F. Reference Contact

Operational Inquiries:

Operations Department, 905-835-5079

Billing Inquiries:

Water Billing Clerk, 905-835-2900