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Cold Weather Best Practices

Water pipes located in a crawlspace or on an outside wall are subjected to sub-freezing temperatures, as are pipes located in a garage or any other unheated building. To help combat this problem and reduce the probability of your pipes freezing and bursting, the County's Bureau of Utilities recommends the following:

- Wrap or insulate exposed pipes susceptible to low temperatures.
- Utilize other devices, such as heat tape, to help keep pipes from freezing.
- Leave hot and cold water dripping the thickness of a pencil on nights when temperatures dip below 15°F.
- Some pipes, such as those located in cabinets or vanities, and situated against an outside wall may be insulated but may be likely to freeze. It is a good practice to leave cabinet doors open to allow heat in the room to keep pipes warm and prevent freezing.

The Bureau also suggests these simple steps to avoid a water leak and damage:

- Turn off inside water valve for any hose connections and open the outside hose bib to drain the line.
- Know where your home's inside main water cutoff valve is and check that it is functional by hand. In case of a leak this valve will turn off water flow coming into the home and thereby limit damage.
- Seal any air leaks that allow icy blasts to reach pipes.
- For homes with crawl spaces, close outside air vents located in the foundation wall during extremely cold temperatures to keep exposed plumbing from freezing.
- If you have a programmable thermostat, consider leaving it at a constant temperature, never below 55°F.
- If you are going on an extended vacation, set your thermostat to at least 55°F or above.

Also, to help keep county fire hydrants from freezing and help prevent street flooding, residents are asked to shovel snow away from hydrants in their neighborhood that are covered or obstructed by snow, as well as keeping debris and snow, away from stormwater runoff drains.

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If your pipes do freeze, the Bureau recommends opening the cold water faucet nearest the frozen pipe to relieve pressure. Then, use a gentle heat source, such as a light bulb or hair dryer, to thaw the pipe. **DO NOT** use an open flame.

Residents are also reminded if you lose water or experience a sewage back-up in your home, call the County first to determine if there is a break in the water main or a blockage in the sewer main beyond your property. During regular business hours, residents are instructed to call the Bureau of Utilities at 410-313-4900. After hours and on the weekends, call Central Dispatch at 410-313-2929 which will then notify a county utility worker.

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