

Burst Pipes and Plumbing Emergencies

This leaflet gives advice and guidance on plumbing problems which you may have in your home.

During cold weather damage and inconvenience as a result of burst pipes is a real possibility. Potential repairs alone can sometimes be costly, however, with some simple precautions, the risk can be reduced.



Precautions you should take

- Try and avoid frozen pipes by keeping your home reasonably warm during the day and at night. In very cold weather, keep the heating on during the night at a low temperature
- If you have exposed pipes make sure that they are adequately lagged.
- If you experience exceptionally low temperatures at any time it is a good idea to open the hatch in the roof space if you have one. Although this may add slightly to your heating bills, it will give additional protection to your water tank and pipes in the roof space
- Get to know your heating controls. Central heating thermostats and time switches can be complicated. Get advice from a heating engineer or energy advisor if necessary
- Make sure that your central heating system is serviced regularly to ensure that it is working in a safe and efficient manner.
- Find your stopcock. This is the valve that turns off the main water supply. Find it now rather than look for it after problems occur. It is commonly found in the kitchen near the sink.
- Keep torches (and any batteries) to hand in case lighting fails or you need to switch off power
- Keep important emergency numbers close to hand – for example a 24-hour plumber

- Check your buildings and contents insurance details so you know what cover you have, for example, home emergency cover.

When you're at home

- If you have central heating, use the thermostat to keep the temperature comfortable. In cold weather, a good daytime setting is between 18°C and 21°C. If it is freezing outside, set the heating to stay on continuously but turn the thermostat lower for the night. Remember, the higher the thermostat the more fuel you use.

When You Are Away

- If you are away for a few days in cold weather and you've got central heating, leave the heating on continuously at a low setting (normally 6°C). This will stop your pipes freezing without costing too much.
- If you haven't got central heating, turn the water off at the stopcock and drain off all the cold water. Then turn off the immersion heater. If you have a solid fuel boiler, let the fire die out and drain off all the hot water.
- Leave a key with a friend or neighbour in case of emergency.

What do I do if I have a burst pipe?

If pipes within your home burst you should take the following action:

- Turn off the mains stopcock at once – it is often located under the sink in the kitchen
- Switch off electricity at the mains. Ensure that the supply is inspected and tested by an electrician before the power is turned back on. For a list of electrical contractors see www.select.org.uk
- Switch off any water heater
- Turn off the central heating system
- Let any solid fuel fire die down
- Open all taps to drain your system but remember to collect water in your bath for washing and flushing the toilet
- Warn any neighbours who may suffer damage.

Blocked toilets

The best thing you can do to stop the pipes in your toilet getting blocked is to watch what you put down it.

This means that you should not put anything large like sanitary towels, baby wipes or nappies down it. Put them in the bin. Toilets should not get blocked under normal circumstances because of the way they are designed to work.

If your toilet becomes blocked do not use it.

Don't keep flushing to try and clear it. This could cause it to overflow and flood the bathroom.

To clear a blockage try the following:

- Firstly put on suitable protective gloves

- Pour a bucket of warm water from above into the toilet bowl
- Place a large plunger in the pan and pump a few times to try to clear the blockage.

If this doesn't work we advise that you call a reputable plumber to attend.

Blocked Sinks

To help prevent blockages do not pour fats and grease down the kitchen sink. Clean waste pipes with hot water at least once a month.

To clear a blockage:

- Firstly put on suitable protective gloves.
- Remove all the water from the sink.
- Hold a rag tightly over the overflow opening and place a plunger over the drain hole.
- Pump the plunger up and down rapidly to clear the blockage.

If using a plunger fails to clear the blockage

Sinks usually have a removable trap under them. If you think your pipe is blocked at the water trap and would like to try and clear the blockage then:

- Put the plug in the sink and put a bucket under the trap.
- Unscrew the trap and clean it out.
- Replace the trap and flush the whole system through with hot water.

Useful contacts

SNIPEF

You can find useful information and approved contractors by contacting SNIPEF (Scottish & Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation) on **0131 556 0600** or at **www.snipef.org**. You can also email **info@snipef.org**.

Scottish Water

To report a water supply problem or discuss any water quality or connection issues or enquiries contact Scottish Water on **0800 0778 778** or email **customer.services@scottishwater.co.uk** 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For factsheets, tips and service updates log on to **www.scottishwater.co.uk**

