

Housingnews

Special Winter Edition

January 2011

This special edition of Housing News is being issued to help you in the future to:

- protect your home during very cold weather, and
- advise on what to do if your water pipes freeze or burst.

The Housing Executive is committed to improving its out of hours emergency repairs service. We will, in the future, have in place

- more telephone lines
- more staff, and
- you will be able to report out of hours emergency repairs by email.

The weather conditions experienced over the Christmas period were some of the worst on record and affected virtually all services including roads, public transport, air travel and water. It clearly also impacted on many of our homes.

Firstly we would like to take this opportunity to apologise to tenants who struggled to get through to our switchboard over the holiday period.

We received tens of thousands of calls relating to heating issues and then burst pipes. Even with the extra resources provided over this period, unfortunately, some customers may still not have been able to contact us. We understand this was frustrating for tenants, however, we were able to deal with the vast majority of calls.

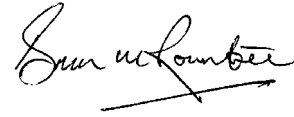
We would have liked to carry out repairs sooner, but weather conditions, the scale and nature of problems, made this difficult.

We are reviewing how we responded during this difficult period in order to improve our service and have already made changes to our out of hours emergency repairs service.

We are also looking at insulation and lagging of pipes in our homes.

This booklet will offer you some useful advice on how to deal with winter weather problems.

We would recommend that you keep this handy for future reference.



Brian Rowntree
Chairman



Stewart Cuddy
Acting Chief Executive

When there is freezing weather ...



Prevent your pipes from freezing

The following precautions will help stop the pipes in your home from freezing.

- Set your timer for the central heating to come on for short periods throughout the day to make sure the temperature in each room is reasonably high.
- Lift the trap door slightly from the roof space to allow hot air from the main house to get into the loft.
- Open the doors to the sink unit to allow warmer air to circulate round the pipes.
- Allow warm air to circulate round the full house by slightly opening the doors to the individual rooms.
- If your home will be empty during the cold weather, ask someone to go in and turn the heating on for a short time and check for frozen pipes or drain down the cold water tank.



Find your stopcock

The stopcock is a valve for turning off and on the cold water system in your home. When you turn the stopcock in a clockwise direction the water supply will be shut off. You can turn the water supply back on by turning the stopcock in an anti-clockwise direction.

Stopcocks are usually found in your kitchen, below the sink unit. However in some houses the stopcock is found in a front or back hall or in a larder unit beside the sink unit. It is important that you know where the stopcock is and that you check your stopcock is working.

Dealing with frozen pipes

- Most frozen pipes are found in the roofspace and below sink units.
- Turn the water supply off at the stopcock.
- Thaw along the pipe starting from the end nearest the tap.
- Put hot water bottles or a thick cloth soaked in hot water over the frozen pipe or use a hairdryer at its lowest setting to thaw pipes. Be careful not to warm them too quickly or they may burst.
- Don't use a blow lamp or any naked flame as this may cause damage to your pipes or lead to a fire in your home.

If you have a burst pipe

- Turn off the water supply by turning the stopcock clockwise.
- Try and block the escaping water with thick cloths like towels.
- Drain the system.
- If the water has come into contact with electrical fittings the electricity should be turned off at the mains.
- Contact us on:

03448 920 901

How do I drain my cold water tank?

- With the water turned off at the stopcock, turn on all the cold taps and flush the toilet several times.
- If you have a Solid Fuel Room Heater or Open Fire which heats your water and radiators you should let it burn out. Do not light it until the systems have been checked. If you have an Open Fire **that does not** heat your water or radiators but provides heat only to the room, it is safe to continue to use.
- Turn off oil or gas heating systems and do not use again until they have been checked.
- Do not use the water heater as this may cause the hot water cylinder to collapse.
- Do not turn on the water supply at the stopcock until the burst pipe has been repaired.

What should I do if my water is cut off?

If your water supply fails the problem may be a burst pipe somewhere in your home or there may be a leak in the mains system.

Call NI Water on **08457 440 088** if you think it's a problem with the mains.

If the water is off, can I use my heating?

Different types of heating system need looking after in different ways in the event of a water supply failure. Check what type of system you have and follow the advice below:

Any heating system with a cold water storage tank and hot water cylinder

If you have a heating system which uses a cold water storage tank (usually in the attic) and if the water supply is cut off but your cold water storage tank is full, it's still safe to run your central heating. **You should not use your hot water.**

A system with a cold water storage tank may give a limited amount of hot water after the supply is cut off, but you risk running the storage tank dry. If that happens it will create an airlock when the water comes back on again, so don't be tempted.

If your cold water storage tank has run dry, **do not use your central heating or your hot water** as this could cause your hot water cylinder to collapse.



Combi boiler

If you have a combi boiler (where your hot water is heated directly from the gas boiler and you don't have a hot water cylinder) you can use your heating but **you must not use any hot water from the taps.**



Economy 7

If you have Economy 7, **turn the immersion heater off.** There should be two switches in your hot press which should be turned off.

Solid fuel central heating system

If you have a back boiler on your fire (ie if your fire heats water or radiators in your home) **do not light your fire while the water is off.** Once the water supply has been restored, light only a small fire at first.



Make sure you insure your house contents

During the extreme weather conditions many Housing Executive homes had problems with frozen or burst pipes, some of which caused damage to tenants personal belongings and furnishings.

If the contents of your home were destroyed or badly damaged by burst pipes could you find the money to replace them? By thinking "It won't happen to me", you could cause a crisis you needn't have suffered. Get your possessions insured.

While the Housing Executive will repair the damage to its properties it is not responsible for damage to the personal belongings or furnishings of its tenants.

There are numerous contents insurance policies available and you can obtain details by looking in your yellow pages or contacting your local insurance broker.

Make sure you get several quotes before making a decision. Many will arrange for you to pay monthly and fortnightly.

EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING EXECUTIVE

Repairs Line 03448 920 901

Website www.nihe.gov.uk

Out of hours emergency services email: emergency.services@nihe.gov.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND ELECTRICITY

Emergency Service 08457 643 643

NORTHERN IRELAND WATER

Faults/Emergency Service 08457 440 088

Water Service Text phone 08457 023 206

NORTHERN IRELAND GAS

Emergency Service 0800 002 001

(Phoenix & Firmus)
Text phone/minicom 0800 7314710

Abandoned homes

If you know of a Housing Executive property which has been abandoned or not being used, report it to your District Office.

Beware of Bogus Callers

Reports of bogus callers tricking their way into people's homes are a regular occurrence.

Often the problem arises because people are very trusting and are willing to accept strangers into their homes. It is very important to be wary.

Always ask for identification. If you are unsure call Quick Check

0800 0132290

a 24 hour freephone service to verify the identity of your caller.

Help your neighbour

The cold weather can be a difficult time for people who are more vulnerable.

If you know someone who is elderly, has a disability, or is housebound, check on them and make sure they are okay.

During extreme weather conditions many older people will not be able to get out and it is at this time that a visit from a neighbour may be appreciated.

Contact your local district office if you would like to obtain this advice in one of the alternative formats.

www.nihe.gov.uk
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