

Tips for preventing and dealing with frozen water pipes

If there is no water from the cold tap in your kitchen and there is no issue with the mains supply in your area, the chances are that the stopcock or the line from there to the house is frozen. It may help to pour warm water over the stopcock – do not use boiling water for this purpose or any naked flame. Remember, however, that if water at any temperature builds up in the stopcock chamber it will almost certainly freeze within minutes: so, use as little water as possible. If the freezing has occurred in the line between the stopcock and the house, the warm water is unlikely to solve the problem.

Try the following to prevent stopcocks from freezing in the first instance:

1. Open the stopcock chamber and remove any water.
2. Fill the chamber with non-absorbent material such as rock wool or fibreglass wool to provide insulation.
3. Don't use absorbent material: it will act as a conductor for the frost.

When the Spring comes, measure the distance from ground level to the stopcock. If it is less than 45 centimetres, you should seek professional advice on having the stopcock lowered or otherwise protecting it against frost. The same applies to the line from the stopcock to the house: in some house these lines may approach ground level as they get nearer to the house.

Do what you can to protect the pipes inside your house. If your attic is insulated it may become extremely cold at night. You should ensure that the area under the roof tank can get heat from underneath, so remove any insulation which prevents that. You should also take professional advice on lagging the pipes in your attic. You can help to ward off some of the cold in the attic by opening the trapdoor that leads into the hall or rooms below, but this may not be sufficient to prevent pipes from freezing, and it should be supplemented by modifying any existing insulation in the area under the tank.

Remember, if you have a burst pipe or frozen supply, to be careful about the use of heating systems, washing machines and other water-dependent appliances and facilities. If you have a problem or concern, contact a qualified plumber for advice.

For empty houses check regularly for leaks. Keeping a low level of heat in the house may help, but be sure to take proper precautions against fire and consult your insurance company to make sure that you are not in breach of your policy.