Risk Management Foundation
RMF Education • Prevention • Preservation

CHI CONSTANTINE HOUSING INITIATIVE

PROTECTING FIRE SPRINKLER SYSTEM PIPES FROM FREEZING IN CHAPTER FACILITIES

Prevent Your Sprinkler System from Freezing this Winter

- Check Your Heating System!
- ALWAYS leave the heat set to a temperature no lower than 60°F, If the chapter facility will be closing for holiday winter or spring breaks during cold weather.
- Inspect Every Room Prior to Closing the Chapter House for Winter or Spring Break.
    - OPEN WINDOWS are one of the most frequent causes of frozen pipes, always make sure the facility is thoroughly checked and all windows are closed before leaving on a holiday break.
- Schedule a Winter Sprinkler System Maintenance Appointment.
- Each Chapter and House Corporation should Appoint a Weather Monitor, who physically visits and enters the property during periods of temporary closure.

How to Prepare Your Sprinkler Systems for the Winter

- Insulate the attic, soffits, and eaves on your building.
- Make sure there is enough weather-stripping on exterior doors and windows.
- Locate any damage or leaks in both windows and doors and ensure they are repaired prior to winter.
- Perform seasonal maintenance on any heating sources, including radiant heating.

During Freezing Temperatures

- A Weather Monitor" should check the weather daily (using National Weather Service or equivalent) and keep the HC officers (and key UG officers) informed of cold weather conditions.
- Monitor and record the temperature in hard-to-heat areas that contain vulnerable equipment; repeat every few hours during particularly cold weather.
- Check temperature in critical areas at night and on weekends, as well as during the day. Use an alarm connected to a security service or a continuously touring/monitoring watch service.
- Take special care when thawing frozen piping and equipment; avoid open flames.

Fire Protection Equipment

- Check both wet- and dry-pipe sprinkler systems regularly to ensure they are ice-free. Make sure systems are checked by professional sprinkler maintenance personnel before winter.
- Keep all fire protection-related equipment (e.g., hydrants, hose houses, pumper connections, and sprinkler control valves) free of snow and ice for easy access.
- Maintain a minimum temperature of 50°F (10°C) in rooms with dry-pipe sprinkler system valves and fire pumps, and a minimum temperature of 70°F (21°C) in rooms with diesel engine-driven fire pumps.

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PROTECTING YOUR CHAPTER FACILITY FROM WINTER STORM DAMAGE

Assessing Your Winter Risk

- Has the facility experienced any winter storm damage in previous years? If so, what precautions are needed to prevent a reoccurrence?
- What is the potential for heavy accumulations of drifting or mounding snow on the roof top?
- What is the primary exposed part of the chapter facility that normally faces prevailing winter winds?
- What interior or exterior water pipes or fire sprinkler pipes are most exposed to freezing temperatures?
- Is all recommended scheduled and preventative maintenance current on chapter facility heating systems, fire sprinkler systems, electrical systems, gutters, windows, doors, and roof?
- Is snow removal equipment operating and ready for winter use?
- Do you have a winter action plan in place should severe winter weather hit your area?

Most Common Causes of Frozen Pipes

- Quick drops in temperature
- Poor insulation
- Thermostats set too low or heating turned off
- Windows or doors left open in members rooms, bathrooms or common areas

Prevention

- If the chapter facility will be closing for holiday winter or spring breaks during cold weather, ALWAYS leave the heat set to a temperature no lower than 60°F.
- Chapters and House Corporations should each appoint a Weather Monitor, who physically visits and enters the property during periods of temporary closure.
- Leave interior doors open in spaces that contain plumbing appliances, faucets and valves so that warm air can circulate through these areas.
- Make sure all exterior windows and doors and vents are closed.
- Check the insulation of pipes in your chapter facility crawl spaces and attic.
- Disconnect any outside garden water hoses from external faucets.
- Heat tape or thermostatically controlled heat cables can be used to wrap pipes.
- Seal gaps or leaks that allow cold air inside near where pipes are located.
- Use an indoor valve to shut off and drain water from pipes leading to outside faucets.
- During any subzero forecasts, let warm water drip overnight.
- Keep your thermostat set at the same temperature during both day and night.
- Open cabinet doors to allow heat to get to un-insulated pipes.
- Install Pipe Burst Pro devices, or similar leak-detection systems.

If Your Pipes Do Freeze...

- If you turn on your faucets and nothing comes out, leave the faucets turned on and call a plumber.
- NEVER touch or use electrical appliances in areas of standing water due to electrocution concerns.
- You may be able to thaw a frozen pipe with the warm air from a hair dryer. Start by warming the pipe as close to the faucet as possible, working toward the coldest section of pipe.
- NEVER try to thaw a frozen pipe with a torch or other open flame because it could cause a fire hazard.