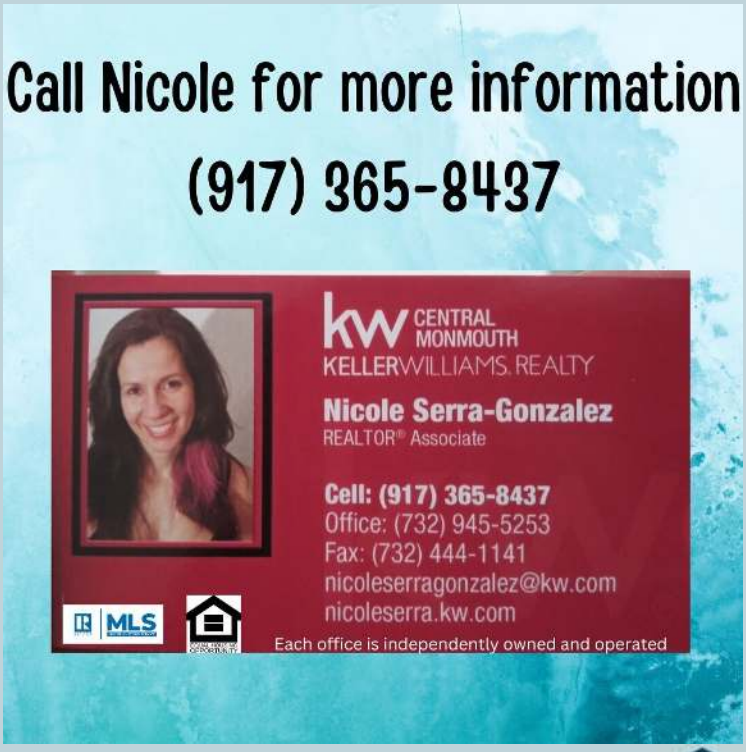
8 HELPFUL HOME MAINTENANCE TIPS

To Save You Money and Keep You Safe!



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Safety FIrst!

1. Check Your Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide

Smoke Alarms:

- Most smoke alarms have a low-battery warning feature, which typically produces a chirping sound at regular intervals when the battery needs replacement.
- To check the battery, look for a battery compartment on the back or side of the smoke alarm.
- Open the compartment carefully, and if the battery is accessible, take it out to inspect its condition. If the battery looks swollen or damaged, replace it immediately.
- Even if the battery looks fine, it's a good practice to replace it regularly, usually once a year or based on the manufacturer's recommendations.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detectors:

- **Similar to smoke alarms, most CO detectors have a low-battery warning system that produces a specific sound when the battery is running low.**
- **Locate the battery compartment on the back or side of the CO detector.**
- **Carefully open the compartment, and if the battery is removable, check its condition. If it's damaged or expired, replace it.**
- **Regularly replacing the battery is crucial to ensure the CO detector functions properly. It's generally recommended to change the battery once a year.**

Keep in mind that some smoke alarms and CO detectors come with sealed, long-lasting batteries that can last for several years. If you're unsure about the type of batteries your devices use or how to replace them, refer to the user manual provided by the manufacturer for specific instructions. Additionally, always remember to test your smoke alarms and CO detectors regularly to ensure they are functioning correctly and providing the necessary protection.

2. Make Sure Your Sump Pump Is Working!

A sump pump is a mechanical device designed to remove water from the lowest point in a basement or crawl space to prevent flooding. It is typically installed in a sump pit, a hole dug into the ground, usually located in the lowest part of the basement floor. When water accumulates in the sump pit, the sump pump activates to pump the water away from the building, usually to a drainage system or a designated area where it won't cause any damage.

Sump pumps are commonly used in homes and buildings in areas where basement flooding is a concern, particularly during heavy rains or in regions with high water tables. They are crucial in preventing water damage and mold growth, protecting the foundation, and keeping the basement or crawlspace dry.

There are two main types of sump pumps:

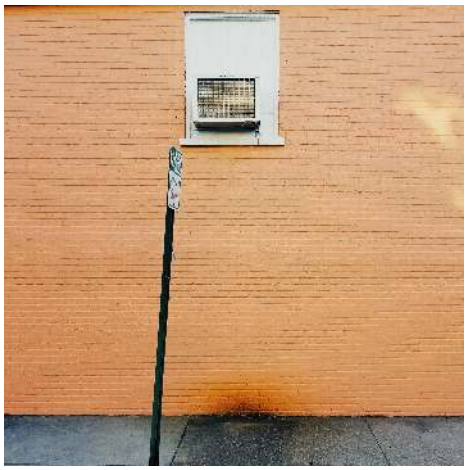
- **Submersible Sump Pump: This type of pump is designed to be submerged in the water inside the sump pit. It is more discreet and quieter since it is located inside the pit.**
- **Pedestal Sump Pump: This type of pump has the motor located above the sump pit, with the pump itself extending down into the pit. While it is more visible and potentially noisier than a submersible pump, it is easier to access for maintenance and repairs.**

When installing a sump pump, it's essential to have a reliable power source, either electrical or a backup battery system, as power outages during heavy storms are often when you need the sump pump the most. Some sump pumps also come with additional features, such as alarms to notify you of high water levels or Wi-Fi connectivity for remote monitoring.

Regular maintenance and testing are essential to ensure that the sump pump functions correctly when needed. It's also crucial to keep the sump pit clean and clear of debris to prevent clogs and to check the discharge pipe to make sure water is being properly directed away from the building. If you're not familiar with sump pump installation or maintenance, it's best to consult a professional plumber or contractor for assistance.

3. Use a Vacuum to Clean Vents

Using a vacuum to clean vents is a practical and effective way to remove dust, debris, and other particles that may accumulate in your HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) system's air vents. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to do it:



- Prepare the vacuum: Ensure you have a vacuum cleaner with a hose attachment or a handheld vacuum that can access tight spaces. If you have a regular upright vacuum cleaner, it might have a hose and attachments that you can use.
- Turn off the HVAC system: Before you start cleaning, turn off your heating or cooling system to prevent the circulation of dust while you clean the vents.
- Remove vent covers: Gently remove the vent covers from the walls or floor. Vent covers are usually held in place by screws or clips. Use a screwdriver or any appropriate tool to loosen and remove them.
- Vacuum the vent covers: Take the vent covers outside or to an area where it's easy to clean. Use the vacuum's brush attachment or a soft brush to remove loose dirt, dust, and debris from the vent covers. You can also wash the vent covers with mild soap and water if they are particularly dirty.
- Clean the vent openings: Insert the vacuum hose or attachment into the vent openings as far as it can reach. Move the hose around to collect dust and debris that might be stuck to the inner surfaces of the vent.
- Be gentle: Be careful not to apply too much force while vacuuming to avoid damaging the vents or dislodging any components of the HVAC system.
- Vacuum the surrounding area: While you have the vent covers off, vacuum the surrounding area to pick up any dust or debris that may have accumulated.
- Reinstall vent covers: Once the vents and the surrounding area are clean, reattach the vent covers securely in their original positions.
- Turn on the HVAC system: After cleaning, turn your heating or cooling system back on and ensure that it's functioning correctly.

It's essential to clean your vents regularly to maintain good indoor air quality and ensure that your HVAC system operates efficiently. If you find excessive dust or other issues during the cleaning process, or if you're unsure about how to clean certain vents, it's recommended to seek assistance from a professional HVAC technician. They can perform a thorough cleaning and inspect your HVAC system for any potential problems.

4. Clean Your Dryer With a Vacuum

Cleaning the dryer with a vacuum is a crucial maintenance task that helps improve its efficiency, prevent potential fire hazards, and prolong its lifespan. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to vacuum clean your dryer:

Note: Before cleaning your dryer, ensure it is unplugged and disconnected from the power source for safety.

Lint Trap:

- **Start by removing the lint trap or lint screen from the dryer. This is typically located inside the dryer door or on the top of the dryer.**
- **Use your fingers to remove any lint or debris that has accumulated on the lint trap.**
- **Next, use the vacuum cleaner with a crevice tool attachment to clean the lint trap slot. Vacuum out any lint or dust that may have gathered in this area.**

Lint Trap Housing:

- **Once you've cleaned the lint trap, remove the lint trap housing cover if possible. Some dryers have accessible covers that allow you to reach deeper inside.**
- **Use the vacuum cleaner with a hose attachment or crevice tool to clean the area inside the lint trap housing. Be gentle and thorough to remove as much lint as possible.**

Exhaust Duct (Vent Hose):

- **Locate the exhaust duct or vent hose that runs from the back of the dryer to the outside of your home.**
- **Carefully detach the vent hose from the back of the dryer. Depending on your dryer's configuration, you may need to use a screwdriver or clamp to loosen the connection.**
- **Clean the interior of the vent hose using the vacuum cleaner with a brush or hose attachment. This step is crucial as lint can accumulate inside the hose and become a fire hazard if not removed regularly.**

Dryer Drum:

If your vacuum cleaner has a brush attachment, use it to clean the interior of the dryer drum. This will help remove any remaining lint or debris that may be clinging to the drum's surface.

Exterior and Lint Trap Area:

Use the vacuum cleaner to clean the exterior of the dryer, especially around the lint trap area and control panel. Dust and lint can accumulate in these areas and affect the dryer's performance.

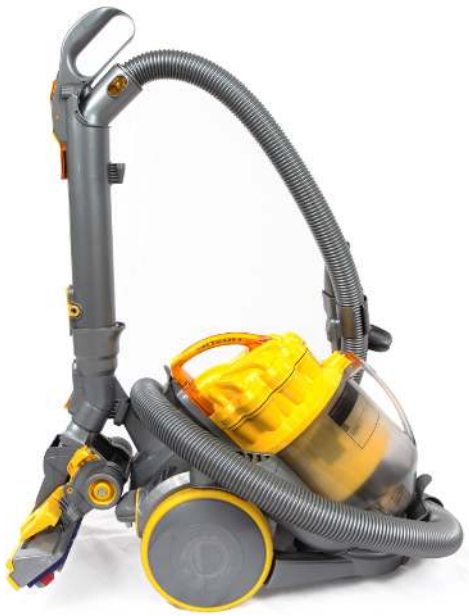
Lint Trap Screen and Housing (Optional):

If you have access to the back of the dryer, remove the back panel or access cover (if applicable) to reach the lint trap screen and housing from the rear. Clean these areas with the vacuum cleaner as well.

Reconnect and Test:

- **After vacuum cleaning all accessible parts, reattach the exhaust duct to the back of the dryer and secure it properly.**
- **Put the lint trap back into its slot and close the lint trap housing cover (if applicable).**
- **Plug the dryer back into the power source.**
- **Run the dryer briefly to ensure everything is functioning correctly.**

Regularly cleaning your dryer, including vacuuming it, can help prevent lint buildup, maintain its efficiency, and reduce the risk of fire hazards. Additionally, always follow the manufacturer's guidelines for maintenance and cleaning specific to your dryer model.

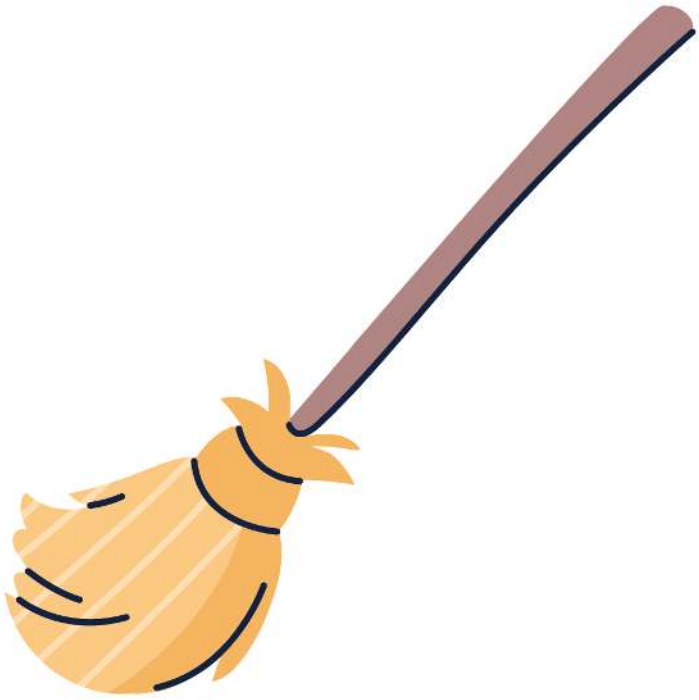


5. Sweep Your Desk So You Don't Slip

Sweeping the deck is an essential maintenance task to keep your outdoor space clean and free from debris. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to sweep your deck effectively:

Materials Needed:

- **Broom (outdoor brooms with stiff bristles work best)**
- **Dustpan (optional)**
- **Trash bag or compost bin (for collecting debris)**



Step-by-Step Guide:

- Clear the Deck: Remove any furniture, planters, or other items from the deck to provide easy access for sweeping.
- Start from the Far End: Begin sweeping from the farthest end of the deck, working your way towards the exit. This ensures that you push debris towards the open area and not back onto the cleaned sections.
- Sweep in One Direction: Sweep the debris in one direction rather than back-and-forth, as it will make the cleaning process more efficient. Use long, steady strokes with the broom to gather the leaves, dust, dirt, and other debris.
- Pay Attention to Corners and Edges: Don't forget to pay extra attention to the corners and edges of the deck, as debris often accumulates in these areas. Use the broom bristles to reach into corners and crevices.
- Collect the Debris: If you have a dustpan, use it to collect the swept debris and transfer it to a trash bag or compost bin. If not, you can use the broom to gather the debris in a pile and then pick it up by hand.
- Dispose of Debris Properly: If you have leaves and organic material, consider composting it if possible. If you have non-organic waste, dispose of it in the appropriate trash receptacle.
- Inspect and Clean: After sweeping, take a moment to inspect the deck for any remaining dirt or stubborn debris. If necessary, you can use a hose or a damp cloth to spot clean specific areas.
- Replace Furniture and Items: Once the deck is clean, put back the furniture and any other items you removed earlier.

Tips:

- **Consider using a leaf blower or a power washer for larger decks or when dealing with heavy debris.**
- **Regularly sweep your deck to prevent the buildup of dirt and leaves, which can become harder to clean over time.**
- **If your deck has wooden or composite flooring, consider using a soft-bristled broom to avoid scratching the surface.**

By regularly sweeping your deck, you can keep it looking tidy, prevent dirt from being tracked into your home, and create a more enjoyable outdoor space for relaxing and entertaining.

6. Have Your Gutters Cleaned Regularly

Cleaning the gutters is an important home maintenance task that helps prevent water damage, roof leaks, and foundation issues caused by clogged gutters. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to clean your gutters safely and effectively:

Materials Needed:

- **Ladder (ensure it's sturdy and tall enough to reach the gutters)**
- **Work gloves (to protect your hands from debris and sharp edges)**
- **Trowel or small shovel (to scoop out debris)**
- **Bucket or tarp (to collect the debris)**
- **Garden hose (with a nozzle attachment)**
- **Safety goggles (optional but recommended)**
- **Safety harness or rope (for added security if you're working on a tall roof)**

Step-by-Step Guide:

- Choose the Right Time: Pick a day when the weather is dry and not too windy. Wet leaves and debris can be heavier and more challenging to remove.
- Safety First: Set up the ladder on a flat, stable surface. Make sure it is secure before climbing. If you're working on a tall roof or feel uncertain about your safety, consider using a safety harness or rope for added security.
- Put on Safety Gear: Wear work gloves to protect your hands from sharp debris, and if you prefer, use safety goggles to shield your eyes from dust and debris.
- Start Cleaning: Climb the ladder and position yourself near the gutters. Begin by using your hands or a trowel to scoop out the leaves, twigs, and other debris from the gutters. Place the debris into a bucket or tarp that you've set up on the roof or near the ladder.
- Clear Downspouts: After clearing the gutters, check the downspouts for any blockages. You can use the trowel or a small plumber's snake to clear any clogs in the downspouts.
- Flush with Water: Once you've removed the bulk of the debris, use a garden hose with a nozzle attachment to flush out any remaining dirt and small particles. Start from the end farthest from the downspout and work your way toward it. This will ensure that any remaining debris is flushed out of the downspout.
- Inspect the Gutters and Roof: While cleaning, inspect the gutters and the roof for any signs of damage, such as cracks, leaks, or loose gutter brackets. Address any issues you find promptly.
- Clean Up: After you've finished cleaning and inspecting the gutters, carefully descend the ladder with all your tools and the bucket/tarp of debris. Dispose of the collected debris in a compost bin or trash receptacle.

Tips:

- **If you're not comfortable with heights or working on a ladder, consider hiring a professional gutter cleaning service.**
- **Regularly clean your gutters, especially during the fall when leaves are abundant, and in the spring after the snowmelt and rains.**

Regular gutter cleaning helps maintain the integrity of your home's exterior and prevents potential water damage, saving you from costly repairs in the long run.

7. Clean Your Chimney and Breathe Easy!

Checking your chimney is an essential part of home maintenance, especially if you have a fireplace or wood-burning stove. Regular chimney inspections help ensure the safety and efficiency of your heating system. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to check your chimney:

1. Visual Inspection:

- **Start by visually inspecting the exterior of the chimney from the ground. Look for signs of damage, such as cracks, loose bricks or stones, and missing mortar joints.**
- **Check for any vegetation, debris, or nests on or near the chimney, as these can be fire hazards.**

2. Interior Inspection:

- **If you have a fireplace or wood-burning stove, open the damper and use a flashlight to look inside the firebox. Inspect for any buildup of soot or creosote, which can be highly flammable.**
- **Check the damper's operation to ensure it opens and closes smoothly.**

3. Check for Blockages:

- **Inspect the chimney cap or spark arrestor at the top of the chimney. Make sure it is in good condition and not clogged with debris or bird nests. The cap helps keep animals and debris out of the chimney while allowing smoke and gases to escape.**
- **If you can do so safely, look down the chimney with a flashlight to check for any blockages or obstructions.**

4. Check for Creosote Buildup:

- **Creosote is a highly flammable substance that can accumulate inside the chimney flue due to burning wood. Excessive creosote buildup can lead to chimney fires.**
- **If you have a significant creosote buildup or are unsure, it's best to have a professional chimney sweep clean the chimney thoroughly.**

5. Check for Smoke and Draft Issues:

On a cool day when you won't be using the fireplace, light a small piece of rolled-up newspaper and hold it up inside the firebox. Observe the smoke:

- **If the smoke rises up the chimney and exits the flue properly, it indicates good airflow and ventilation.**
- **If the smoke comes back into the room, it may indicate a drafting problem, which should be inspected and addressed by a professional.**

6. Schedule Professional Inspection:

- **While some basic checks can be done by homeowners, it's essential to have a professional chimney inspection and cleaning at least once a year.**
- **A certified chimney sweep can thoroughly clean the chimney, identify potential issues, and ensure your chimney is safe and in good working condition.**

Important Note: If you suspect a chimney issue or encounter any problems during your inspection, it's best to contact a qualified chimney professional to assess and address the situation. Chimney-related tasks can be dangerous, so safety should always be the top priority.

8. Don't Get Caught In The Cold - Insulate Your Pipes

Insulating outdoor pipes is a crucial step to protect them from freezing temperatures during cold weather. Frozen pipes can lead to burst pipes and water damage, so it's essential to insulate exposed pipes to prevent such issues. Here's how to insulate outdoor pipes:

Materials Needed:

- **Pipe insulation sleeves or tubes (made of foam or fiberglass)**
- **Insulating tape or zip ties**
- **Scissors or utility knife**
- **Clean cloth (for wiping pipes if they are dirty)**

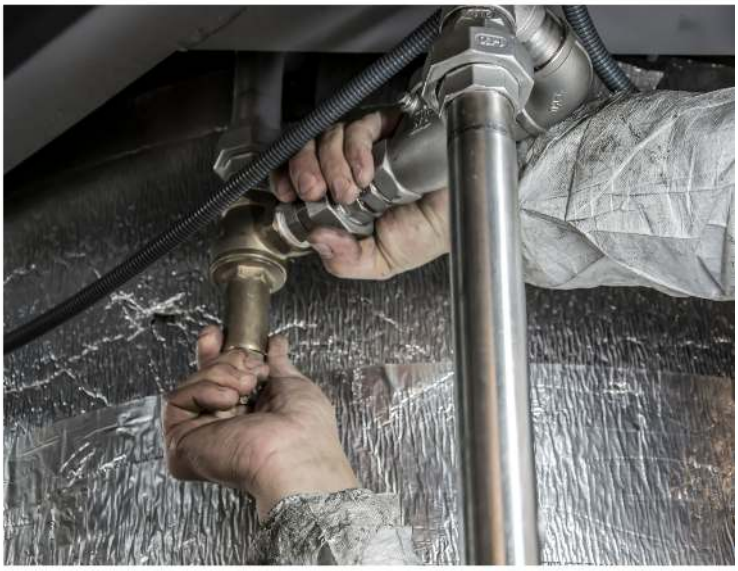
Step-by-Step Guide:

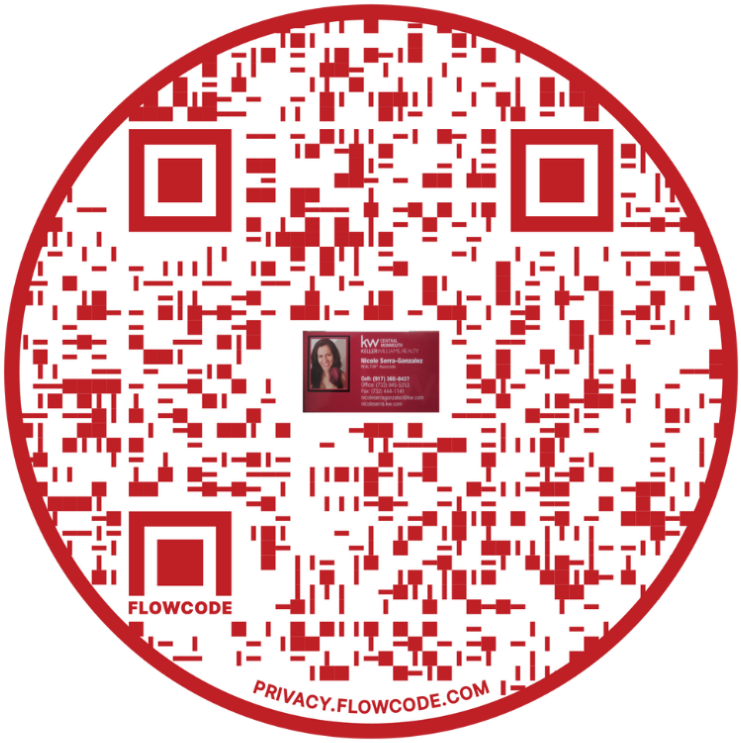
- Identify Exposed Pipes: Determine which outdoor pipes need insulation. These are typically pipes that are exposed to the elements, such as water supply lines, sprinkler system lines, and outdoor faucets.
- Measure the Pipes: Measure the length of the pipes that need insulation to determine the amount of insulation material required. Make sure to account for any bends or turns in the pipes.
- Prepare the Pipes: If the pipes are dirty or have debris on them, wipe them clean with a cloth before applying insulation. Dry the pipes if they are wet.
- Cut the Insulation Tubes: Using scissors or a utility knife, cut the pipe insulation tubes to the appropriate lengths to fit each section of the exposed pipes.
- Open the Insulation Tubes: Most insulation tubes come pre-slit or pre-scored. Open the tubes by separating the slit or score along its length. If the tubes are not pre-slit, you may need to cut them lengthwise to open them.
- Wrap the Pipes: Wrap the opened insulation tubes around the exposed pipes. Make sure the insulation fully covers the pipes and overlaps at the seams.
- Secure the Insulation: Use insulating tape or zip ties to secure the insulation in place. Wrap the tape around the insulation at regular intervals, or use zip ties to hold the insulation firmly in position.
- Cover all Exposed Areas: Ensure that all areas of the pipes exposed to cold air are covered with insulation. This includes bends, joints, and connections.
- Pay Attention to Faucets: For outdoor faucets (hose bibs), consider using a specialized faucet cover, often made of foam, to provide extra protection against freezing.

Additional Tips:

- **Insulating outdoor pipes is particularly important in regions with harsh winter climates where temperatures regularly drop below freezing.**
- **If you have a sprinkler system, consider draining the water from the lines before winter to prevent freezing and potential damage to the system.**
- **Check the insulation regularly to ensure it remains in good condition. Replace any damaged or deteriorated insulation promptly.**

By insulating your outdoor pipes, you can help prevent frozen pipes and potential water damage, ensuring that your plumbing system remains intact and functional during cold weather.

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