

# Safety Talk

JANUARY 2025



## PREVENTING FROZEN PIPES

Frozen water pipes can pose a hidden danger that may go unnoticed until significant damage has occurred. As water freezes within a pipe system, it typically expands by 10% or more. This expansion can block the pipe and, in some cases, cause the pipes to crack or burst, leading to water damage and expensive repairs.

### Which Pipes Are Most at Risk?

- Water pipes in unheated, interior locations such as basements, crawl spaces, attics and outdoor buildings.
- Check pipes located in fire sprinkler rooms, mechanical rooms, isolated rooms or unoccupied rooms.
- Outdoor hose hookups and faucets.
- Lawn sprinkler lines.
- Wet water fire sprinklers.

### How to Help Prevent Frozen Pipes Before Winter:

- Check buildings for areas where water pipes are located in unheated or poorly insulated areas.
- Be sure to check cabinets that may contain uninsulated plumbing.
- Make sure any insulation that has been removed for maintenance work has been reinstalled.
- Make sure all dry wall has been repaired or reinstalled after construction work or repairs.
- Find air gaps in attic spaces and seal them up.
- Ensure hot and cold water pipes are insulated.
- Consider utilizing pipe sleeves or UL approved heat tape/heat trace on water lines and sprinkler systems.
- Ensure back up generators are being tested monthly.
- Inspect and maintain all sprinkler systems in accordance to NFPA 13 codes.
- NFPA 13 requires that wet sprinkler pipes should be maintained at or above 40 degrees. If pipes are not maintained at this temperature, consider the use of heat trace combined with insulation and weatherproof jackets.
- Have spare parts available for heating units to ensure they will function properly when cold weather strikes.
- Prior to a water emergency, ensure you have fans, wet vacs and squeegee tools available to help mitigate water damage.

### During Winter:

- Monitor your local weather and know when temperatures are expected to drop below freezing.
- Maintain adequate heat in all buildings.
- Monitor thermostats to ensure employees have not turned thermostats too low. Keep heat in buildings set at a minimum of 55 degrees.
- Open cabinets to allow heat flow to water pipes.
- If necessary, turn on faucets and allow them drip slowly. This is especially true for pipes located on outside walls.
- Disconnect all outside water hoses from the faucets.
- Ensure maintenance personnel are performing regular maintenance checks in all buildings during extreme cold weather conditions.
- Make sure adequate heat is provided in riser rooms/sprinkler valve rooms.

## PREVENTING STAIRWAY ACCIDENTS

Because employees and patrons use stairways often it doesn't usually seem like a risky venture to "take the stairs" when it is just a normal part of the workday. Falls down staircases may be funny in slapstick comedies, but in real life, they are anything but. Falling injuries on stairs are among the most dangerous accidents the body can experience due to the fact that falls down stairs have multiple impact points that can cause serious injury. These falls happen more frequently than one may expect. According to the National Safety Council more than 1 million injuries are caused by stairway falls each year in the U.S. Stairway accidents are the second leading cause of injury, with motor vehicle accidents being the leading cause and Stairway accidents result in 12,000 fatalities each year.

### Common Stair Hazards That Can Cause Falls

**Poor lighting.** Dim lighting because of burnt-out or missing lightbulbs, or low-wattage lights, often cause staircase falls. In the darkness, you also can't see other hazards or damaged steps.

**Objects left on the stairway.** Storing items on the stairs is inappropriate and dangerous. These objects are not only tripping hazards but they also leave little room for using the stairs, and can make handrail use difficult. Property owners must also keep outdoor stairs clear of obstacles and debris.

**Missing or damaged steps.** Staircases that have missing, loose, or damaged steps pose a danger.

**Slippery steps.** Property owners should keep outside stairs clear of snow and ice. Both indoor and outdoor stairs should be made of slip-resistant materials.

**Missing or damaged handrails.** Handrails provide added stability and safety, especially for the elderly. If there are no handrails, or if they are not sufficiently secured, they cannot help prevent falls.

**Miscellaneous stairway hazards.** A loose or frayed rug or carpeting, missing or loose tiles, rotting wood, crumbling concrete, uneven steps, can all lead to stairway falls.

To prevent serious slip and fall injuries, building and property owners need to ensure stairwells, entryways, and access ramps have handrails that are well-maintained, up to building codes, and are not faulty. These duties fall under premises liability. Premises liability laws state that all property owners have a legal obligation to ensure their properties are safe for visitors. If they fail this duty, they may be held liable for injuries. Employers are responsible for ensuring workplace stairways are safe and employees should alert management to any unsafe issues or potential hazards noticed on or near stairways. Frequently inspect stairways for irregularities such as damaged steps, loose handrails, corrosion, holes, grease, spills, or loose carpet/rugs. Take immediate action to repair issues with the stairs or the handrails.

## DRESSING FOR COLD WEATHER

When the winter weather hits, workers face additional hazards like hypothermia and frostbite when working outdoors. The best way to protect yourself is to dress properly for extreme winter weather.

### How to Layer Clothes for Cold Weather

When layering, it's important to consider clothing layers, and what each layer can do for you. This helps you choose clothing with the correct functionality and fabric. Additionally, by choosing three functional layers, you will stay toasty and warm while maintaining the ability to move and perform well on your job.

**Base Layer:** The base layer serves to remove sweat from skin. In order for the base layer to work properly, it should lay against the skin so that it can effectively move moisture away from the body. When choosing a material for a base layer, you have the option to choose a lightweight, midweight or heavyweight fabric. Lightweight materials quickly remove moisture and dry quickly however they lack insulation. Synthetic fabrics, such as polyester and nylon, are great lightweight material options. Midweight base layers, such as a wool polyester blend, incorporate the moisture wicking of a lightweight layer, while adding insulation. A heavyweight base layer gives you insulation and supplements a lighter base layer.

**Middle Layer:** After your base layer comes the middle layer. The middle layer captures and traps heat. Like the base layer, the middle layer should also work to move moisture away from your body. Fleece and wool are great options. You should avoid cotton as it traps moisture and takes a lot of time to dry.

**Outer Layer:** The outer layer serves as a shell to protect you from the elements such as wind, rain, and snow. The outer layer should be waterproof or water-resistant to keep water off your inner clothing.

**Boots:** Always choose quality boots and socks. Cold feet can lead to your whole body being cold.

**Socks:** When choosing socks, you should avoid cotton. Cotton traps moisture against your skin keeping your feet wet and cold. Instead, find a sock made from a polyester blend like fleece or choose a wool blend.

**Hands:** When choosing gloves, you can pick between a fully insulated pair of gloves, or wearing both a lighter glove liner underneath a heavier pair of gloves.

**Head:** Remember as a kid, when mom always said, "Take your hat or all the heat will escape from your head." Well, she was right! It's recommended to wear a toboggan made of wool or fleece. Both feel soft, stay insulated, and have moisture wicking abilities.

### Other Ways to Keep Warm

**Eat for Warmth:** When cold, your body burns more calories than it does in warm temperatures. Consume high calorie, high fat foods before spending time in wintery weather to help your body maintain a good core temperature.

**Stay Dry:** Most importantly, choose clothing designed to keep you dry and warm. Have extra clothing available in the event you do get wet.

## PROPERTY DAMAGE DURING WINTER CONDITIONS

Extreme weather can pose a lot of risk to buildings and property. With the right precautionary measures, you can avoid costly damage to buildings and property. Listed below is information to help you reduce potential risk during winter weather.

### Stay Informed:

- Pay attention to National Weather Service alerts and warnings.
- Download weather alert apps on your cell phone.
- Make sure you have a system in place to communicate with maintenance staff in case of emergencies.

### Preventative Actions:

- Insulate water pipes. If water pipes do burst due to freezing conditions, know how to shut off water valves.
- Ensure HVAC units are in good operating condition. Do not allow buildings to get below freezing temperatures. Keep the interior temperature of buildings above 55 degrees.
- Service your fire prevention and safety equipment, making sure all sprinkler systems, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and fire alarms are in working order.
- In case of power outages, ensure emergency lights are functional. If the building is supplied with a generator, make sure routine inspections are performed and that it is functional.
- Do not allow more than 2 foot or more of snow to accumulate on roofs. If snow needs to be removed, hire a licensed, bonded and insured roofer/general contractor to remove the snow.
- Repair roof leaks prior to winter. Also, make sure gutters are clear so ice does not build up and damage the gutters.
- Inspect windows both inside and outside to ensure they are properly sealed.
- Trim back tree limbs and branches to reduce the potential for building/auto damage.

**Don't leave your property in the cold when winter weather moves in!**

## JANUARY 2025 QUIZ

### TRUE or FALSE

1. Choosing three functional layers of clothing is one of the best options for staying warm in cold weather.

**True or False**

2. To prevent serious injuries, building and property owners need to ensure stairwells, entryways, and access ramps have handrails that are well-maintained, up to building codes, and are not faulty

**True or False**

3. Before cold weather strikes, you should inspect your building to ensure that the building temperature is set below 55 degrees to prevent the potential for water pipes to freeze.

**True or False**

4. NFPA 13 requires that wet sprinkler pipes should be maintained at or above 40 degrees.

**True or False**

5. It is a good idea to clean gutters prior to cold weather to ensure debris does not build up and damage the gutters.

**True or False**

### Answers

1. True 2. True 3. True 4. False 5. True