

# Make sure you've got winter all wrapped up

This leaflet gives you some handy tips and advice to help you keep warm and safe during the winter months.

## Heating

Due to rising fuel bills, many people put off switching their heating on until the weather takes a turn for the worse.

We recommend that you test your heating to ensure any problems with your central heating system or boiler can be identified and fixed before you really need it.

We suggest you:

- ◆ Pick a day in September or early October to test your heating is working.
- ◆ Switch on the heating, making sure it runs for at least four hours. This can be done on a low setting, gradually increasing the temperature to the required winter setting.
- ◆ Test thermostats and radiator controls by turning them up and down.
- ◆ Test radiators by checking they are hot from top to bottom.

If you find any problems with your heating system please call your local customer services centre.

## Frozen pipes

Frozen pipes can also be a very common problem during the winter months and can be a serious issue. It does not have to snow or sleet for pipes to freeze, which can happen when temperatures reach 0°C. In these temperatures the water in a pipe may freeze, causing the pipe to expand and potentially burst, resulting in extensive damage to your home.

You can take a few preventative measures, to avoid this happening:

- ◆ Before the start of winter, make sure all hoses are disconnected and outside taps are turned off.



- ◆ Avoid leaving garage doors open if there is pipe work in the garage. Basic protection can be added by wrapping exposed pipes in pipe insulation or newspaper.
- ◆ Run water through your taps regularly – frequent use of the cold water supply will reduce the chances of water freezing.
- ◆ Regularly inspect your plumbing (inside and outside) for signs of freezing. The first sign of a frozen pipe is usually when no water comes out of the tap, but you can also see it. Frozen pipes may have frost on the outside, be covered in ice, or be bulging.

## What should I do if I have a frozen pipe?

- ◆ Open all of your taps fully.
- ◆ Check for leaking joints or burst pipes.
- ◆ Apply a hot water bottle, or thick towels soaked in hot water to pipes to help them defrost. Start at the end of the pipe nearest the taps and work your way along the pipe.
- ◆ Use electric fan heaters, only if it is safe to do so, to warm the room where the frozen pipe is. Do not use electrical items if there is a chance the pipe has already burst.
- ◆ **NEVER** use a naked flame to defrost pipes.



- ◆ Do not try to thaw the pipe too quickly as there may be splits in the pipe which are not immediately noticeable.

### Warning!

- ◆ **Do not rush thawing the pipe** by using water that is too hot.
- ◆ Always make sure that you are **standing at ground level** when pouring water onto it - do not climb to a higher level to reach frozen pipes.
- ◆ **Never disconnect** the pipe.
- ◆ **Always use suitable protection** for your hands when handling hot water.

## What should I do if my pipes burst?

If your water pipes burst because of freezing, the first thing you will need to do is to turn off your water supply at the mains, so make sure you know where your water stopcock is - it is often under the kitchen sink, in the bathroom or under the stairs.

- ◆ Turn off your water supply at the stopcock.
- ◆ Turn on all the taps in sinks and baths to drain the system, making sure you remove any plugs.
- ◆ Switch off your electricity supply if there is a chance that water could come into contact with electrical wiring or fittings.
- ◆ Call our customer services centre and report the repair.
- ◆ Warn neighbours who may suffer damage as a result of the burst pipes in your home.



## Frozen boiler condensate pipes

Frozen condensate waste pipes are a common problem in the winter months. The majority of modern boilers have condensate pipes taking water vapour away from your boiler, making it more energy efficient. The condensate pipe is usually plastic, running from your boiler and discharging internally into a waste pipe or externally into a gully.

In cold weather the condensate pipe (particularly those running externally) can freeze, even if insulated. If this happens then your boiler will automatically shut down and leave you without central heating and hot water.

There are a couple of ways to tell if your condensate pipe is frozen.

- ◆ You may hear some bubbling sounds coming from the boiler or the pipe itself.
- ◆ There may also be a warning light on your boiler indicating that the pipe is frozen.

If you want to try thawing an external condensate pipe yourself you can:

- 1 Warm some water** in the kettle - do not use boiling water as this could crack the pipe or scald you.
- 2 Stand away from the wall** and gently pour the warm water onto the frozen pipe.
- 3 Repeat** until the pipe has thawed.
- 4** Once the condensate pipe has fully thawed, **the boiler will need to be reset** using the reset switch. Once reset, the boiler should fire up and run as normal.
- 5 If you are unable to reset your boiler** please contact our customer services centre to arrange an appointment for an engineer to attend.

If you are still having problems please call us and we will arrange for an engineer to visit.

## What can you do to make sure you are winter-ready?

### Heat your home well

- ◆ Set your heating at the right temperature, ideally between 18°C – 21°C and try to heat your bedroom overnight. If this isn't possible, warm your bedroom at night before you go to bed.
- ◆ If you have storage heaters, make sure they are set to fully charge at night, when electricity is cheapest
- ◆ Make sure that your windows and curtains are closed, to keep the warmth in.
- ◆ Use an electric blanket or hot water bottle to warm your bed, but NEVER both together. Electric blankets should only be used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions and fire service safety advice: [www.fireservice.co.uk/safety/electric-blankets](http://www.fireservice.co.uk/safety/electric-blankets).

### Eat well, keep active and look after yourself

- ◆ Dress warmly by wearing several thin layers rather than one thick one.
- ◆ Try not to stay sitting down for long periods as any kind of activity gets your circulation going and makes you feel warmer.
- ◆ Regular hot meals will provide warmth and energy so keep stocked up on some basic foods so you don't need to go out on very cold days.

- ◆ If you have a disabled or older neighbour or relative, look out for them during the winter months to make sure they are warm and well too.
- ◆ Find out whether your local pharmacy offers a prescription pick-up and delivery service.
- ◆ Keep a battery-operated radio, torch and spare batteries handy in case there's a power cut. If you have a mobile phone, laptop or tablet, keep it fully charged so you can use the battery power if there's no electricity.

### Get support

Keeping your home warm can be expensive, especially if you are on a low income.

#### The Winter Fuel Payment

If you are aged 62 or over, you can claim up to £300 in a winter fuel payment. These are one-off payments that are normally made during November and December.

The Winter Fuel Payment is made to each eligible person in a household. Each person who qualifies will receive a letter explaining what they will get, depending on their age and personal circumstances.

If you received the Winter Fuel Payment last year and your circumstances haven't changed you should be paid again this year, without needing to claim. If you think you are eligible for a payment and didn't receive it last winter, you can claim by completing a form online at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).



## Cold Weather Payment

A Cold Weather Payment helps people on low incomes to heat their homes when it is particularly cold.

You will be eligible for a Cold Weather Payment if you have a child under 5 years old or you receive one of the following benefits:

- ◆ Pension Credit
- ◆ Income Support
- ◆ Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- ◆ Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- ◆ Universal Credit

If you are eligible for a Cold Weather Payment you will receive £25 for each week that the average temperature in your area falls to zero degrees Celsius or lower, for seven consecutive days between 1 November and 31 March.

You should receive the Cold Weather Payment directly to your bank account. If you think you are eligible but haven't received the payment contact Job Centre Plus.

To check that you are receiving all the financial help you can get, please call your local customer services centre and ask to speak to our employment and money advice team on **0800 048 8955**.

## Contents Insurance

### If you can't afford to replace it, you should really think about insuring it!

What would you do if you lost everything because of a fire or flood in your home?

As your landlord, it is our responsibility to insure the building in which you live. Buildings insurance covers the cost of repairing damage to the structure of a property, as well as the cost of replacing things like pipes, cables and drains.

This insurance DOES NOT include your personal possessions.

It's your responsibility to arrange home contents insurance to cover your belongings from accidental damage and fire, flooding and theft.

No matter how careful you are, accidents can happen and there's always a risk that your belongings, such as carpets, furniture, curtains and costly electrical items could be damaged and need replacing.

By taking out a contents insurance policy, that can cost just a few pounds a week, you can relax knowing that everything can be replaced.

The widespread flooding that we have seen in a number of areas recently has really brought home the importance of contents insurance, with customers who didn't have this cover struggling to replace furniture, clothing and household appliances.

There have also been several house fires which caused extensive damage and resulted in the loss of belongings.

Please visit the Citizen's Advice website – [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) for further contents insurance guidance.

v2 Oct21