

Don't Get Left Out in the Cold: Preparing Your Home and Auto for the Winter Freeze

The chilling air and dark night signal that winter's wrath is knocking on our door and that it's time to weatherize our homes and automobiles. Early preparation can save consumers time, money, and frustration dealing with a burst pipe, an ice dam, or a dead car battery.

"The winter months can be very damaging to your home and car if you don't plan ahead," says agent Eric Nier. "By following some simple guidelines and taking some precautions, your home and car have a better chance of surviving the winter intact."

The Checklist Starts at Home

The potential for pipes to freeze increases dramatically when the temperature falls below 20 degrees and the winter winds pick up strength. Frozen pipes often burst, and burst pipes mean flooding. You can help prevent pipes from bursting by following these tips from Eric Nier Insurance, the American Red Cross, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency:

- Detach all gardening hoses and shut off water supply to outside faucets.
- Wrap pipes nearest exterior walls and in crawl spaces with pipe insulation or heating tape.
- Caulk or weather-seal windows to cut down on wind drafts.
- Tag the location of your main water valve and be sure you can easily turn it on and off.
- Replace any thermostat batteries regularly.
- Shut off the water supply to your washing machine when not in use.
- If you plan to travel or be away from home for an extended period of time, ask a friend or neighbor to check your pipes and the temperature in your home.

During a deep freeze, consider the following steps:

- Keep the temperature in your home at no less than 68 degrees.
- Keep cabinet doors open to allow heat from the home to circulate around the pipes.
- Check the water flow from all faucets before going to bed and again in the morning. (Reduced water flow can signal early freezing of pipes.)
- Allow your faucets to drip lukewarm water to minimize the chances of a pipe freeze.
- Remember, a pipe doesn't necessarily burst the first time it freezes. It may take several freezes and thaws before damage occurs. A little preventive action and forethought, though, can swing the odds in your favor.

Burst pipes are just one problem wrought by Old Man Winter. Ice dams, or ridges of ice that form on gutters, eaves and valleys, prevent melting snow from running down, forcing the water under shingles or tiles and into your home. Ice dams develop when heat from a roof covered with at least eight inches of snow moves through the roof and melts the bottom layer of snow.

You can prevent ice dams by mounting proper insulation and avoiding improper removal of ice and snow. Here are some additional tips Allstate offers to avoid ice dam formation:

- Keep gutters and downspouts clear of leaves and natural debris.
- Identify areas of heat loss in your attic and properly insulate them to prevent heat from escaping.
- Minimize heat loss through the attic by wrapping or insulating all heating ductwork.

- Avoid using sharp tools or ice picks on gutters or downspouts, which can damage roofs. Use a snow rake or soft broom to clear fresh snowfall from gutters.
- Contact a professional snow removal company to clear existing ice dams.
- Avoiding falling icicles or avalanching snow. Avoid getting on the roof and working on a ladder or beneath a roof that has accumulated large amount of snow.

Keep Your Checklist Moving With Your Car

While running through your winterizing checklist, be sure to include your car. Winter is just as hard on your car as it is on your house. Have a mechanic look over your car whenever you spot something that seems not quite normal. An inspection now may prevent your being stranded on a cold winter day.

The following tips from Eric Nier Insurance will help to prepare your car for the cold weather:

- If your engine is experiencing hard starts, stalling, or other problems, fix it now, not later.
- Install new windshield wiper blades. Blades should make full contact with the window. Keep extra washer fluid and an ice scraper in your car.
- Keep a cold weather safety kit in your car that includes gloves, boots, blankets, flares, water, and a flashlight.
- Examine your tires for tread life and uneven wearing. Be sure tires are properly inflated. Tires lose a pound of pressure for every 10 degrees the temperature drops.
- Make sure the heater and defroster are properly working to ensure driver visibility.
- Flush the cooling system every two years with a 50/50 mixture of antifreeze and water. Check the level, condition, and concentration of the antifreeze mixture periodically.

- Check your battery fluid levels, battery posts, and cable connectors. Bad connections can prevent your car from starting.
- Check your brakes as recommended. If you're experiencing trouble such as pulsations, noises, or longer stopping distances than seem normal, have a professional look at it immediately.
- Make sure all lights and bulbs are in working order and replace any burned-out bulbs.

To learn more about preventing burst pipes, ice dams, winterizing your car, and other winter safety tips, contact Eric Nier Insurance at 715-341-3838 or 1-800-886-8135. [_](#)