



# City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor  
**Seattle Public Utilities**  
Chuck Clarke, Director

## News Release

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### For Immediate Release:

Andy Ryan, 206-684-7688 OR Joe Mickelson, cell 206-972-8953  
Pager: (206) 997-5972 [joe.mickelson@seattle.gov](mailto:joe.mickelson@seattle.gov)  
[andy.ryan@seattle.gov](mailto:andy.ryan@seattle.gov)

### **Coldest Weather in 18 Years is Forecast; Protect Pipes Now From Freezing**

*Seattle Public Utilities Advises Protecting Pipes, Outside Faucets with Insulated Coverings*

**SEATTLE** — In December 1990, six days of freezing weather wrought havoc with the region's water infrastructure. Hundreds of pipes froze and burst throughout the Seattle area, causing the leakage of millions of gallons of water, flooded homes and the loss of service for numerous residents.

Now, eighteen years later, the National Weather Service is calling for at least seven days of temperatures well below freezing; and Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) is urging water customers to take extra precautions to protect pipes from freezing.

"If today's forecast holds true, we could be in for the same kind of prolonged freeze we had in 1990," said Joe Mickelson, SPU's director of water operations. In 1990, Mickelson said, many of the worst problems occurred after the cold weather passed and frozen pipes began to thaw.

"The problem can be just as bad on the back end of a freeze as on the front," Mickelson said. "Homeowners and businesses can save themselves a lot of heartache and expense if they take steps — right now — to winterize their pipes. The alternative to acting now could be the cost of a plumber's visit and huge repair bills for flood damage."

And, he said, while your leak is being repaired, at your own expense, you might have to go for a while without water.

Here is a list of tips that can help prevent costly damage and repairs to your home—and keep you safe on the streets:

- Prepare your water pipes for cold weather, ahead of time. Shut off outside faucets, drain the water and protect them by insulating them with rags or foam covers.
- If you're going to be away, or if you have renters, or own a vacant property, ask a friend or neighbor to check your house daily to make sure it's warm enough to prevent freezing — or shut off and drain the water system. Be aware that if you have a fire protection sprinkler system in your house, it will be deactivated when you shut off the water.

—MORE—

Seattle Municipal Tower, 49th Floor, 700 Fifth Avenue, Seattle WA 98104-5004  
Tel: (206) 684-5851. TTY/TDD (206) 233-7241. FAX: (206) 684-4631

- Drain and remove all outdoor hoses, and shut off and drain in-ground sprinkler systems.
- Pipes in exposed or unheated areas (attics, basements and garages) should be wrapped with tape and insulating materials, available at local hardware stores. Newspapers, rags or other paper products make excellent insulation if wrapped around pipes to a thickness of about 3 inches. The paper then should be covered by a waterproof material such as plastic.
- Property owners should check for any exposed pipes in unheated areas. That includes basements, garages, attics and crawl spaces.
- Once it drops below freezing, protect indoor sink pipes that are against exterior walls, by opening under-sink cabinet doors, allowing heat to circulate. During severe cold, allow the faucet farthest from your front door to slowly drip cold water. Set your thermostat no lower than 55 degrees Fahrenheit, day or night (even if you are away).
- Do not leave water running in unoccupied buildings. If the drain should plug, it could cause a flood.
- Please don't use hair dryers to thaw frozen pipes — you face the risk of electrocution!
- If a water pipe breaks, immediately close the main shut-off valve to stop flooding. If you cannot turn off the main shut-off valve, Seattle residents can call (206) 386-1800 and a crew will turn off the water at the meter for a standard service charge.
- Businesses with above-ground, outdoor fire services should take steps to prevent these pipes from freezing. These services can be protected with heat tape, available at hardware stores.
- In the event of snow, residents are asked to help keep street drains clear by removing snow and other debris — if it can be done safely. As the snow melts, blockages in the gutters or drains will hinder runoff, increase the risk of flooding, and make the morning commute more difficult.
- If an inlet or street drain appears to be blocked by snow or debris, try to safely clear a channel to provide a path for the runoff. If the drain cannot be cleared, or if the cause of the blockage or flooding is uncertain, call Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) at (206) 386-1800.

Learn more at <http://www.seattle.gov/util/>

In addition to providing more than 1.3 million customers in the Seattle metropolitan area with a reliable water supply, SPU provides essential sewer, drainage, solid waste and engineering services that safeguard public health, maintain the City's infrastructure and protect, conserve and enhance the region's environmental resources.

—SPU—