How to Keep Your Pipes From Freezing in East Tennessee

East Tennessee winters can be unpredictable. One night the temperature hovers just above freezing, and the next it drops into the teens. For homeowners, that swing often means trouble for exposed or poorly insulated pipes. A frozen pipe can burst, and a burst pipe can flood a basement, ruin drywall, and leave you without water for days. The good news is that a few straightforward measures can keep your plumbing safe through the coldest months. This article walks through the steps that matter most, what to watch for at each stage, and when to call a professional.

Know Which Pipes Are at Risk

Not every pipe in your home freezes at the same time. The ones most vulnerable are those in unheated spaces: crawl spaces, attics, garages, basements, and exterior walls. Pipes that run along outside walls with little insulation behind them are especially prone. So are hose bibs and sill cocks that stick out from the house. If you have had a problem in a particular spot before, that same spot will likely freeze again unless you change something. Walk through your home and note every pipe that touches cold air. That list is your starting point.

Insulate the Exposed Sections

The simplest first step is to add pipe insulation. Foam rubber sleeves, often called tubular pipe wrap, slide over straight runs of pipe and can be cut to length with a utility knife. For corners or short stub-outs, pre-slit foam pieces or fiberglass wrap work well. Where pipes run through crawl spaces or attics, you may need a thicker R-value. Pay special attention to the first foot or two of pipe coming out of the concrete slab or the exterior wall. That transition point is a common freeze spot because the surrounding air is much colder than the ground or the interior wall cavity. Insulation does not generate heat; it only slows heat loss. If the air around the pipe stays below freezing long enough, even insulated pipes can freeze. So insulation works best when combined with other steps.

Seal Air Leaks Around Pipes

Cold air moving across a pipe accelerates freezing. Check where pipes enter the house through the foundation, the rim joist, or an exterior wall. If you can feel a draft or see daylight around the pipe, seal the gap with caulk, spray foam, or weatherstripping. For larger openings around multiple pipes, a piece of rigid foam board cut to fit and sealed at the edges is effective. This

step does more than most people realize. Stopping the airflow keeps the pipe warmer than insulation alone can.

Let Faucets Drip During Extreme Cold

When temperatures are forecast to stay below 20°F for several hours, let a faucet drip. Open the cold water tap at the highest fixture in the house and the hot water tap at the lowest fixture. A slow trickle or a steady drip (about one drip per second) keeps water moving through the system. Moving water freezes at a lower temperature than still water. The drip also relieves pressure that builds up if ice starts to form inside the pipe. That pressure relief is what prevents a burst. Dripping water costs very little and can save thousands in repairs. One caution: be sure the drain is clear so the dripping water does not back up or overflow. If you have a basement sink that rarely gets used, run a little water through it every few days anyway to keep the trap and drain line from freezing.

Open Cabinet Doors Under Sinks

Kitchen and bathroom sinks on exterior walls often have pipes that run inside the cabinet. On very cold nights, open the cabinet doors so warm room air can circulate around the pipes. If the cabinet is against an outside wall, the back of the cabinet may be only half an inch of plywood away from freezing air. Opening the doors helps. Remove any cleaning supplies or paper goods that might block airflow. For pipes that run in a vanity against an outside wall, this simple habit makes a real difference.

Drain Outdoor Lines and Store Hoses

Before the first hard freeze, disconnect garden hoses from outdoor spigots. Drain the hose and store it in a garage or shed. If you leave a hose attached, water trapped in the spigot and the hose will freeze and expand, often cracking the spigot or the pipe just inside the wall. After disconnecting the hose, close the indoor shutoff valve for that outdoor line if you have one. Then open the outdoor spigot to let any remaining water drain out. Leave the spigot open for the winter. That way, if any water is still in the line, it has room to expand without breaking anything. The same principle applies to irrigation system lines and pool supply lines. Blow them out with compressed air or drain them completely if you can.

Keep the Heat On and Consistent

If you are leaving town for a few days during cold weather, do not turn the thermostat below 55°F. A colder house speeds up heat loss from pipes inside the walls. Keep the heat set to a consistent temperature day and night. Drastic setbacks, like dropping the thermostat to 50°F at night, can let interior wall cavities cool enough to freeze pipes on the other side. If you have a

room that is rarely used, like a guest bedroom or a mudroom, leave the door open so warm air can circulate. For a vacation home that stays unheated for weeks, the safest approach is to drain the entire plumbing system and turn off the water heater. That is a more involved process and should be done by a professional if you are not confident in the steps.

Watch for Signs of a Frozen Pipe

If you turn on a faucet and nothing comes out, the pipe may be frozen. Do not assume it is a supply issue. Check other faucets. If only one is dry, you have a frozen section. The most common sign is a trickle that slows to nothing. Sometimes you hear a gurgling sound or see frost on the pipe itself. If you suspect a frozen pipe, open the faucet so that when the ice melts, water can escape. Then apply gentle heat to the frozen section. A hair dryer, a heat lamp, or a space heater placed a safe distance away works. Never use an open flame or a torch. Propane torches can overheat the pipe and start a fire or burst the pipe from steam pressure. Work from the faucet end toward the frozen area. Once water starts flowing again, let it run for a few minutes to clear any remaining ice.

Know When to Call a Pro

Some freeze situations go beyond what a homeowner can safely handle. If the frozen section is behind a wall, inside a concrete slab, or in a hard-to-reach crawl space, the right tool is often a pipe-thawing machine, which uses low-voltage electrical current to warm the pipe from within. That equipment takes training to use safely. Also, if a pipe has already burst, you need a plumber to cut out the damaged section and replace it. A temporary patch with epoxy or a pipe repair clamp may hold for a while, but a burst pipe in a wall or under a floor should be repaired properly to avoid mold and structural damage. For reliable service in this area, many homeowners turn to a local professional. The site plumbing-seymour-aeac56.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com connects residents of Seymour with a Knoxville-based plumber who knows the local freeze patterns and can handle the tough repairs.

What to Do If a Pipe Bursts

If water starts spraying from a pipe or you find a puddle that keeps growing, shut off the main water valve immediately. Every adult in the house should know where that valve is and how to turn it. Usually it is near the water meter in the basement, crawl space, or utility room. Once the water is off, open the lowest faucet in the house to drain the remaining water from the system. Then call a plumber. While you wait, mop up standing water and move anything valuable away from the area. If the leak is inside a wall, you may need to cut out wet drywall so the wall cavity can dry and so the plumber can reach the pipe. Do not turn the water back on until the repair is complete and the system has been checked for other weak spots.

Prevention Pays Off

A few hours of work in the fall can prevent a messy, costly emergency in January. Insulate the vulnerable pipes, seal the drafts, drip the faucets during a deep freeze, and drain outdoor lines. Know where your main shutoff valve is. And if a pipe does freeze, warm it slowly and safely. For those situations that require a professional touch, the team at **plumbing-seymour-aeac56.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com** has the experience to get your water running again without further damage. East Tennessee winters are not the harshest in the country, but they are cold enough to wreck an unprotected pipe. A little preparation keeps your plumbing working through every cold snap.