

Department of Buildings Offers Tips for Winterizing Buildings

With heating costs getting higher and higher, it's more important than ever for owners to make sure that their buildings are ready for winter. The Department of Buildings suggests some simple ways to help keep buildings warm and safe as the cold months begin.

✓ REDUCE DRAFTS TO STAY WARMER

Loose fitting windows and doors and insufficient insulation can be major sources of heat loss in any building.

- Insulate your attic. The majority of heat that escapes from a home is from the roof. Proper insulation of at least six inches will prevent heat loss.
- Insulate windows. Windows should be properly sealed with weather proofing materials to prevent drafts.
- Insulate doors. Even closed doors can be a major source of heat loss. Weather-stripping around the edges will help keep heat in the house.

✓ TAKE CARE OF HEATING EQUIPMENT

Proper maintenance of heating equipment can assure maximum efficiency. Also, it can reduce the risk of a malfunction, which otherwise could cause hazardous levels of carbon monoxide to enter your home or building.

- Do not allow any non-qualified person to service your heating equipment. Persons working on heating equipment must be familiar with its operation and maintenance.
- Have your heating equipment cleaned and serviced yearly to insure its safe and efficient operation.
- If you suspect that your heating equipment is not functioning properly, shut it down and call a qualified heating repair company. Boiler repair companies are usually licensed as Plumbers or Oil Burner Installers. Boiler cleaning companies are not licensed because they only clean boilers and chimneys. They are not authorized to repair equipment.
- To verify if a boiler repair company has a plumber's or oil burner installer's license online, call 311 or visit www.NYC.gov/buildings and check the records in the Buildings Information System.
- Have your chimney cleaned and checked once a year, preferably before the heating season starts. If you have not had your chimney inspected within the last 3 years, you should have this done as soon as possible to make sure that there is no blockage and to insure that it has the proper sizing for the heating unit it serves.

- Contractors that repair chimneys must be licensed by the Department of Consumer Affairs as a home improvement contractor. Call 311 or visit www.NYC.gov/consumers to check on a license.

✓ **INSTALL A CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR**

In addition to smoke detectors, New York City law requires the installation of at least one carbon monoxide detector in most residences.

- Check/change the batteries of carbon monoxide detectors and smoke detectors twice a year. Use the beginning and ending of daylight savings time as your reminder.

✓ **AVOID DAMAGES AND LEAKS -- CLEAR SNOW FROM ROOF TOPS**

Snow and rain that collect on roofs can present a threat to the structural integrity of a building if the accumulated weight becomes too great.

- Remove leaves and debris from roof drains to prevent water from collecting.
- In addition to cleaning out gutters, clear snow from roofs and drains.
- Special care should be taken with flat roofs, which can be especially susceptible this time of year. Because there is little evaporation, snow and water can collect and only be removed via drainage systems or manual means.

✓ **PROTECT WATER METERS AND PIPES FROM FREEZING**

Most water meters and pipes are in basements, crawl spaces, and other unheated areas where cold winter temperatures could cause them to freeze. Building owners are responsible for protecting meters and pipes from freezing.

- Repair broken and cracked windows, doors, and walls.
- Install storm windows on basement windows.
- Tightly close doors and windows to the outside.
- Insulate outside walls.
- Eliminate drafts from crawl spaces.
- When you are checking to see how cold the area is where your meter and pipes are installed, remember that it is colder near the floors and foundation walls.
- Turn off the water to outside faucets, remove hoses, and drain the pipes.
- Ask your local plumbing supplier about materials to insulate pipes and meters. If your meter is installed in an unheated garage, take extra care to ensure the meter is insulated.

- If pipes or the meter are in a closed cabinet against an outside wall, insulate the wall and open the cabinet to allow warmer air to reach them.
- If you are not going to be home for several days during cold weather, arrange to have someone visit periodically and turn on a faucet to ensure that the water is still flowing.

IF YOUR WATER SERVICE LINE, PIPES, OR METERS FREEZE:

- **Never thaw a frozen pipe or meter with an open flame. Not only is this a fire hazard, it also may cause a steam explosion.**
- Open a faucet near the frozen point to release vapor from melting ice.
- Carefully direct a hair dryer or heat lamp at the frozen section, or put a small space heater nearby.
- If you are unable to thaw the frozen pipes, consult a licensed plumber to perform a repair.
- If your meter freezes and breaks because you failed to take reasonable steps to protect it, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will repair or replace the meter and bill you for the cost.

If your water meter is damaged by the cold, contact the DEP by calling 311 or visiting www.NYC.gov/dep.

OTHER TIPS FOR THE WINTER SEASON

- Do not let candles burn low and do not place them near flammable materials or where children can reach them.
- Keep space heaters away from draperies and linens.
- Make sure your heating oil company has had its delivery truck inspected by the Department of Consumer Affairs to check for faulty meters. For more information, visit www.NYC.gov/consumers.

Visit the Department of Buildings online at www.NYC.gov/buildings.