NFWB Frozen Service

The Niagara Falls Water Board is bound to operate within the rules and regulations established when it was created by the New York State Legislature. These regulations may be found on the NFWB website, nfwb.org, under *Reports >> Other Reports >> Consolidated Laws*. The regulations establish the respective responsibilities of the utility and the private service/lateral owner. These responsibilities are graphically depicted in a diagram also available on the website under *Home >> FAQ's >> Questions about Residential Usage >> Who is Responsible*. This diagram can also be obtained at the NFWB offices.

Among other stipulations, the regulations require that individual property owners be responsible for their privately-owned, privately-installed water service piping. If a service line that is 2 inches or smaller breaks between the NFWB water main and the curb valve, the NFWB will repair it to stop the leak, but in no circumstance can the NFWB perform thawing work on any portion of a frozen private service line. A property owner remains responsible for thawing their own frozen water service.

Voluntary Preventative Measures

Any NFWB customer who believes their service might be subject to freezing can elect to run a small stream of water to prevent the freezing.

A single, continuous stream about the width of a pencil lead is often sufficient, and will use about two gallons per hour. A stream the width of a pencil would usually be much more than necessary, but would use about 15 gallons per hour

Capturing some of the water stream in clean containers would provide a temporary supply if the measure is not effective

Proper drainage from the sink or fixture in use should be checked frequently.

Periodically measuring the stream's temperature can reveal a decreasing temperature in a stream that's running too slow

Standard water and sewer charges would apply to customers choosing to run their water to avoid freezing, however the cost of this preventative measure is far less than a corrective measure of hiring a contractor to thaw an already frozen service.

Steps you can take today to prepare your pipes for winter

- Ensure you know where the main water shut-off valve is in your home and how it operates.
- Insulate pipes most prone to freezing, especially near outside walls and in crawl spaces, the attic and garage. This can be done with foam pipe covers available from building supply or home improvement stores.
- Seal air leaks in your home and garage to stop cold air from getting in. Check around windows and doors, electrical wiring, dryer vents and pipes.
- Unscrew outdoor garden hoses, turn off the outdoor water supply, and allow the taps to drain before the first frost.
- If your pipes are prone to freezing, there may be a problem you cannot see. Consider contacting a plumber for advice on how best to protect your home.
- Commercial water customers - protect fire lines by wrapping all lines exposed to cold.

What to do when the temperature drops well below zero

- Ensure areas that contain indoor water pipes are kept above 55°F specially near the water meter.
- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage.
- Open kitchen, bathroom and laundry cabinet doors to allow warm air to circulate around the plumbing.
- If leaving for an extended period of time, turn off the water at the main service valve in the basement and open the taps to drain the water from your plumbing lines. You may also wish to have someone check your home regularly.
    - For your own peace of mind, you can choose to run a pencil-thin stream of water to ensure some movement of water in the pipes. However, you will be charged for the water used if you choose this step.
    - Run cold water from the lowest point in the house, usually a laundry room sink or tub.ensure the drain is kept clear of debris to prevent overflowing.

Thawing a Frozen Service

Once frozen, a homeowner must engage the services of a licensed plumber to thaw their line. Contractors may attempt pipe thawing by injecting hot water into the service line from the dwelling, or they may attach a device to impress an electric current on the copper line to thaw the frozen water.. Homeowners are cautioned to secure a properly qualified contractor who addresses issues of safety, electrical grounding systems, temperature monitoring, etc. Depending upon weather conditions, a thawed service line may refreeze if other preventative measures aren't subsequently taken.

Temporary Water Supplies

An owner of a residence with a frozen service can request to have the NFWB establish a temporary water supply from an adjoining property

The affected property owner must first obtain permission from the supplying owner to establish the connection.

Secondly an outside, assessable, and functional hose faucet must be present on both properties. NFWB crews will provide and connect a hose run between the two faucets.

The supply is not intended to be used for drinking or cooking; bottled water should be used for those purposes.

The frozen property is advised to run a small continuous water stream to avoid freezing in the temporary above ground hose run.

Neither property owner is charged for water consumed during the active period of supply, although minimum billing criteria still apply.

During unusually harsh winters, the NFWB and the City may jointly provide bottled water at no charge until a property owner can have a frozen service thawed. If that becomes necessary, public service announcements will be made and NFWB staff responding to affected properties will inform customers directly.