MARBLEHEAD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION

THE FLOW N' GO

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PREPARE YOUR HOUSE NOW FOR WINTER WEATHER AHEAD

Welcome to Time Travelers, Inc. Please, step aboard our Time Machine for a short trip back in history.

The Time and Destination dial is set for Marblehead, Mass., February 14, 2016. Hold on … we're off!

We have arrived safely. We step off the Time Machine and are greeted with some of the coldest air we have ever felt—minus 9 degrees with a wind chill of minus 36 degrees.

We quickly recall that Sunday morning, Valentine's Day, when Boston recorded the coldest temperature in nearly 60 years. That's the day we all stayed in bed, cuddled up in our footed flannel pajamas, and wrapped ourselves in layers of blankets.

Now lets travel forward to the days following this cold snap. Temperatures started to warm up nicely with Monday hitting a high of 35 degrees, Tuesday at 54 balmy degrees and Wednesday at 46 degrees. Things were beginning to thaw out, including the water pipes in our homes.

That's when the calls started pouring in to the water and sewer office for broken pipes and frozen water meters. More such calls in a week's time than anyone can remember.

And most of these callers didn't exactly hear what they wanted to hear. They would need to contact a plumber to repair the damaged pipes and would have to have a new water meter installed—at their expense. Yikes!

Okay everyone, back onto the Time Machine. Lets set the Time and Destination dial ahead to Marblehead, February 14, 2017, one year later. Upon arrival, we find that the 2017 Old Farmers' Almanac's prediction for an "Ice cold and snow-filled" winter was accurate.

But one thing is noticeably different this year: there are fewer calls at the water and sewer office for burst pipes and frozen water meters.

That's because homeowners had paid attention to the suggestions in the October—December, 2016 issue of *The Flow N' Go* and took steps to prevent their pipes from freezing this year.

How did they prepare their house for winter?

They disconnected and drained all of their outside hoses. If accessible, they turned off the valves to their outside spigots.

They insulated walls and attics and caulked and weather-stripped their doors and windows. This proved especially important for those whose water pipes and water meter is located near these areas where the cold air can get inside.

They wrapped their water pipes in the basement or crawl spaces with insulation sleeves to slow heat transfer.

During the periods of extreme cold, they kept their cabinet doors open to allow warm air to circulate around pipes. This is particularly important for kitchen and bathroom cabinets that are located against an outside wall or over an overhang.

Some even kept a slow trickle of water flowing through faucets connected to pipes that run through unheated or unprotected spaces.

Those 'snowbirds' who were lucky enough to escape the colder months by flying south for the winter even had their water system drained before they left.

Ready for one last trip on the Time Machine? The Time and Destination meter is set for Marblehead, today's date.

What do we see? Smart homeowners busily preparing their homes for the long winter that lies ahead!

TIP OF THE QUARTER

Marblehead's water supply contains no lead though lead-bearing materials may be present in some *household* plumbing and fixtures.

Flush your lines before using water. In the morning, run your cold water for about one minute to clear out water that has been sitting in the pipes. (Collect the water in a container and use it to water your plants.)

Go to www.MWRA.com for lead and copper testing results.

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YOU AWAKEN TO A FROZEN WATER PIPE. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

You wake up one frigid January morning and open your kitchen faucet to fill the coffee pot with water and only a trickle comes out. You are now in panic mode without your morning caffeine fix. You suspect a frozen pipe.

But how do you know for sure that you do have a frozen pipe? Getting only a trickle of water after a bitterly cold night is a good indication.

Other signs of a frozen pipe include a water line that is covered in frost, toilets that won't refill after a flush or a pipe that is bulging like a well-fed snake.

Either you didn't read this issue of *The Flow N' Go*, your best efforts at protecting your pipes from freezing have failed or, like this writer, became lazy and didn't heed his own advice.

What should you do?

If you are able, you could locate where the pipe is frozen and attempt to thaw it yourself. Otherwise, you will need to call a plumber.

If you decide that you are a DIYer, try the following:

First, because the real trouble can occur after the thaw, you should shut off the water supply and examine all of the pipes for any splits, especially the area between the freeze and the faucet. If the pipe is split, keep the water off and call a plumber.

Once you have located where the freeze is and confirmed there are no splits, you can turn the water back on.

Fully open the affected faucet and other hot water faucets in the house.

Now comes the task of thawing the frozen section of the pipe. You should always keep safety in mind when thawing pipes.

The best method to unfreeze the freeze is to apply heat to that section of the pipe using a hair dryer, heat lamp or heating pad or towels soaked in hot water wrapped around the pipe. Never pour hot water directly on the frozen line. Start thawing from the side of the open faucet and work towards the frozen area. (This will keep steam from being trapped by the ice and causing the pipe to burst.)

You should also *never* attempt to thaw a frozen pipe by using a blowtorch, kerosene or propane heater or any open flame.

When the water starts to flow, turn the faucets down to a trickle. Running water through the pipe will help melt the ice.

If you encounter any problems or are not fully confident in your ability to thaw the pipes yourself, always play it safe and call a professional!

MORE WAYS TO PREPARE YOUR HOUSE FOR WINTER

Fall is officially here! While many of us may try to deny that winter will soon follow, it is a foregone conclusion.

On the front of this issue of *The Flow N' Go* we share ways to protect your home from frozen pipes and water meters during periods of sub-freezing temperatures. But there is so much more that a homeowner should be doing to prepare their house for winter.

Before the real snowflakes start falling, check out the 'snowflake' tips below:

* Purchase an insulated blanket for your hot water heater. This will keep the heat from escaping.
* Insulate your attic floor to minimize the amount of heat rising into the attic from within the house.
* Reverse your ceiling fans. Running the fan in a clockwise direction will produce an updraft and push the warm air near the ceiling into the room.
* Test your sump pump by slowly pouring several gallons of water into the pit to see if it pumps out.
* If your heating system hasn't been cleaned in a while, call in a heating expert to have your furnace tuned up so that it runs at its peak efficiency.

Kids' Corner

The science behind frozen water pipes

Much of this issue of *The Flow N' Go* is devoted to protecting your home from winter's bitter cold—especially keeping your water pipes from freezing.

Water can take three different forms: liquid (water), gas (steam or vapor) and solid (ice). It is the solid form of water that can damage your water pipes. Ice expands but pipes don't.

As the water freezes, it takes up more space than when it was still in the liquid form. It expands. This causes pressure inside the pipes to increase, often resulting in the pipe breaking.

Interestingly, the pipe will usually not burst at the frozen part but somewhere between the area of the freeze and the faucet. The ice blockage can cause thousands of pounds of water pressure to build up.

Leaving the faucet dripping, one of the suggestions offered in the article on the front of this newsletter, will relieve the pressure buildup. (A dripping faucet will not prevent the pipes from freezing but can slow the freeze process and can prevent the pipe from bursting if it does freeze.)

To view a YouTube video of how a pipe can freeze and burst, Google "Steve Stangler Science Bursting Water Pipe." There are a few videos that both kids and adults alike will enjoy by seeing the science behind a bursting water pipe.