

Tips and Strategies to Address Fire Safety Issues in Freezing Weather Conditions

Many Ontario communities, particularly in the north, are contending with infrastructure failures due to frozen municipal water mains. This is resulting in frozen water mains and hydrants, leaving many buildings without sprinkler protection. Sprinkler systems are an important fire safety measure in buildings that rely on these for protection of occupants. When water mains are frozen, there is an increased risk in the event of a fire. There are important steps that should be taken, to ensure continued compliance with the Ontario Fire Code and assure continued protection from fire.

Tips for Businesses and Industrial Properties:

- Notify your local fire department to ensure they are aware of fire protection system impairments affecting your property/buildings.
- Review your building fire safety plan, and take necessary actions and alternative measures, as approved by the local fire department – for example, notify designated supervisory staff about these impairments.
- Make temporary operational adjustments to reduce fire risk/impact, for example:
 - discontinue manufacturing and other high hazard activities
 - eliminate ignition sources
 - impose a temporary smoking ban
 - post a fire watch
 - have extinguishers readily available
 - ensure there are clear egress routes/exits from building and beyond
 - ensure adequate and unobstructed fire department access routes

Tips for Vulnerable Occupancies/Schools:

- Contact your local fire department to ensure they are aware of fire protection system impairments.
- Review your building fire safety plan and take necessary actions and alternative measures, as approved by the fire department.
- Ensure sufficient supervisory staff members are available.
- Impose a temporary smoking ban.

Tips for Residents and Homeowners:

Many communities are experiencing problems with the main water supply due to frozen pipes. This may interfere with the fire department's ability to access water to fight fires. It is critical that residents be especially vigilant to ensure that everyone remains safe during this time. Please review the following fire safety information and take every possible precaution to prevent fire in your home.

- Avoid using torches/open flames to thaw pipes and never use these indoors
- Have working smoke alarms on every storey of your home and outside all sleeping areas. If your smoke alarms are wired into the household electrical system, make sure you have a battery back-up so they will still alert you to fire if there is a power outage. Test your smoke alarms monthly.
- Avoid using candles – choose safer alternatives such as flashlights, flameless candles and glow sticks.
- If you smoke, smoke outdoors and obey “No Smoking” signs in your building. Never smoke where medical oxygen is being used.

- Never leave cooking unattended – stay in the kitchen and keep items that can catch fire away from the stove.
- If you use a portable space heater, plug the heater directly into the wall outlet, *not* an extension cord. Keep the heater away from anything that can burn. Turn off the heater before leaving home or going to bed.
- Plan and practice your escape plan so everyone can get out safely and quickly in the event of a fire.
- Make sure that access routes for the fire department are clearly marked and kept clear.

Messaging and Strategies for Fire Departments:

Extra vigilance is warranted by fire departments in these circumstances:

- Actively assess risks associated with specific occupancies affected
- Pre-plan for responses to affected occupancies
- Consider alternative measures that can be taken in buildings based on the building fire safety plan, such as:
 - Advise building owners to discontinue high-hazard activities while sprinkler protection is impaired
 - Institute a fire watch to patrol the premises until the system is restored to operating condition, with FD notification
- Establish alternative water supplies at buildings without water, for example water shuttles, pumpers, portable water supplies, mutual aid.

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Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management | Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services

OFM website: www.ontario.ca/firemarshal

Fire Code online: http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_070213_e.htm