

Pipes need extra care in the winter

MSU News Service

When the temperatures dip below zero, Mike Vogel always get calls about how to prevent freezing pipes.

Vogel, the Montana State University Extension housing and environmental health specialist, says there are five main ways to keep pipes from freezing — or bursting — in the cold.

Open all sink cabinet doors to expose warm house air to the water supply and drains. If the washing machine is in a closet, open that door as well.

People can increase the warm air flow by removing under-sink products and towels or even use a small fan to circulate warm air.

This is the one time residents should let a cold water faucet drip, says Vogel. The water moving slowly through the pipes generally will keep the water from freezing the supply pipes from the water main or pump.

In addition, if you haven't already done so, make sure outside hoses are disconnected, and, if possible, shut off the water supply to the outside faucet.

Homes should be kept at a steady temperature rather than setting the temperature down as you would normally do to save energy.

"The additional energy

cost will be a lot less than paying for a burst water pipe and the clean-up," says Vogel.

Pipes in unheated areas like crawl spaces and garages should be given special attention. They should be insulated so that cold drafts cannot reach the pipes. Make sure vents are closed in crawl spaces. They can be left closed until spring.

In general, when temperatures dip below zero, keep a vigil on your pipes. Periodically open a faucet to flush water through them.

If pipes do freeze, have an electric heater on hand to immediately thaw the blockage to prevent the entire pipe from freezing and bursting.

Vogel says heat tape can be used but only with "extreme caution."

"Quite often they are improperly installed," Vogel added. "If not properly installed by a professional, they can cause house fires. They should not be put in contact with house materials other than the metal pipe intended and there should be no use of extension cords."

For more information on home energy topics, contact the local MSU Extension office or visit the MSU Extension Web page at www.msuextension.org/energy/homes.html.