

Avoid the great escape of water this winter

The last thing any business wants is to find their premises unusable because of a water leak. It is important to carry out simple checks and to take precautions to help you.

It is easy to be lulled into a false sense of security and, as the recent weather has shown us, the British weather is nothing if unpredictable. November started off being mild for the time of year and then we get more snow than we have seen in November for years.

A small leak can quickly grow in to a major burst resulting in destroyed equipment, floors and ceilings, with everything from stock, stationery, tools and computers becoming ruined beyond repair. That is without the disruption to business, and sometimes the urgent need to find new premises. Even with insurance many businesses will struggle to cope.

When your premises are unattended, such as over the weekend or Christmas holidays:

- Keep your heating system on as though it is business as usual, just turn the thermostat down. This will ensure that in the event of freezing conditions, the heating will come on, preventing the water in your pipes from freezing and bursting the pipes potentially leading to major water damage when the temperature rises.
- Make sure your pipes and loft are insulated. This will help stop pipes freezing and bursting in areas most at risk from the cold such as outside walls and unheated areas.
- If a member of staff or a security company is responsible for keeping an eye on the premises over any shut-down periods let them know where the stopcock is in case they have to turn off the mains water supply in a hurry.
- Have a clear plan worked out for what you would do if there was an escape of water and make sure all key telephone numbers are to hand for anyone taking care of your premises.

Where premises are empty for an extended period:

- All services should be turned off at the mains and all water tanks apparatus and pipes should be drained to the fullest possible extent.

Where a property is likely to be unoccupied for any such extended period you should inform your insurer as additional terms will usually apply.

It is not just during the cold winter months that you need to keep an eye on your pipes.

It is a good idea to:

- Inspect plumbing joints from time to time throughout the year.
- If you have copper pipes and you see a build up of green colouring on joints it could be a sign of a leak.
- If you have plastic plumbing joints then remember that they will probably degrade sooner than metal ones, so keep an eye out for even the slightest hint of water.
- Ensure that plumbing joints that are hidden such as on radiators or behind office furniture are also checked.
- Regular checks on any pipes located in vulnerable areas where there is a chance of damage, for example from machinery, consider additional pipe protection.
- Insulate header and water tanks and check ball valves for signs of wear.
- Be aware of where pipes run, they do not always run where you expect them to. Use a metal detection tool before you put in any nails or screws. A screw through a pipe may not leak immediately, but when the screw rusts.

When the heating is turned back on after a break:

- Check all radiators and pipes for any leaks that may have developed whilst the system has been off.

Maintenance contracts can be arranged for your plumbing, heating and ventilation systems, but you should check that they carry suitable public liability insurance.

