

Winter Hints & Tips

Property

Protecting your business during the winter months



With winter weather drawing in and the festive period approaching, now is a good time to take reasonable steps to ensure a risk free winter.

Security

If you are leaving your property empty over the festive period, consider:

- Checking your premises over the closure period for any signs of disturbance, but don't go alone and make sure you have a mobile phone with you. Post should be removed from the letterbox as this indicates the building is empty and is also a fire hazard.
- Review external security – check that all windows, doors and locks are closed and locked and any intruder alarms and CCTV systems are working, as these act as the first line of defence against an incident.
- Review internal security – secure cash tills and stock on display and store valuable items in a secure room. Service and maintain your intruder alarm and ensure that it is set. Closing internal doors can also help slow down the spread of a fire, should one occur.

Frozen and Burst Pipes

Burst pipes can cause severe damage to stock, ceilings, floors and electronic equipment and, with the winter months drawing in, now is a good time for businesses to take measures to reduce the chances of pipes bursting or freezing. Some checks include:

- Keeping the heating system ticking over – whilst a lot of modern boilers have frost protection thermostats, those that don't should be set to a suitable level to prevent pipes from freezing, especially at night when temperatures drop. Don't set the thermostat temperature too low as freezing may occur before the heating system has a chance to raise the inside temperature up to a suitable level, particularly if your premises are large.
- When closing the business for a few days and where this will not impact essential services*, you could turn off the stop cock to switch off the mains water supply and minimise any impact of water damage.
- Check insulation – you should ensure that all water pipes liable to freezing are lagged and the conditions of the insulation is intact and of a suitable thickness. A useful insulation thickness spreadsheet calculation tool can be found on the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme website: www.wras.co.uk
- Condensing boilers – outlet pipes can be prone to freezing causing the boiler to stop working. Further information on this matter can be found on the Heating & Hot Water Industry Council website: www.centralheating.co.uk
- Oil and gas LPG gas fuelled heating systems – make sure you have plenty of oil/gas in the tank. Don't let it run low during periods of severe weather as deliveries may be interrupted
- Locate the water supply stop cock – familiarise yourself with its location so in the event of a burst pipe you can turn off the water supply.
- Keep stock and belongings clear of the floor** in case of incidents.

*water, gas and electricity for essential utilities such as the following should not be switched off: fire protection systems (including sprinkler systems and fire alarm/fire detection systems), security, safety and 24 hours process controls and supplies to various alarms and monitors.

**some business insurance policies state that stock kept in a basement or on the ground floor has to be stored at a specific height above floor level so please check yours.

Protecting People

- Trips and slips are the single most common cause of injuries at work and a risk assessment of areas affected by poor weather should be completed. Considerations should be made for both the public and for your employees (including those asked to keep the premises clear)
- The Government has issued guidance on snow clearance, which can be found at: http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/NI1/Newsroom/DG_191868
- Monitor the weather forecast in your area and keep employees aware of any weather warnings.

Be prepared and keep your business protected this season.