



## OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

February 2015

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### WINTER TIPS

Winter has been and continues to be relentless this year in many parts of the country. Some cities have placed a bounty on PA's famous groundhog Punxsutawney Phil. His prediction of six more weeks of winter didn't warn of the looming cold and snow measured by the foot, rather than by the inch.

If you're in the property management business you have likely had one or more weather related

emergencies at your properties. In the student housing market the heat management of these properties can be more challenging since the tenants often times leave for long periods of time, or choose to not operate the heat at higher temperatures in order to save money.

Unfortunately, not staying on top of these properties can have expensive consequences.

Let's first discuss the prevention of freezing pipes; domestic water,

drain lines, heat lines or sprinklers. Anything with water in the pipe is subject to freezing. It isn't always the freezing that causes the mess, but the thaw. Lower than normal temperatures in your area of the country will have different results depending on the original design of the water systems. Many times the freezing of the pipes is a secondary issue. The primary issue is that the heating system failed, or was turned back or off. Proper maintenance is essential, and checklists

to remind staff to turn the heat on as winter approaches.

Other times it is high winds accompanied with the cold temperatures. Winds will work through cracks and openings in the exterior envelope and can freeze pipes that are in this area. Sealing the openings and insulating the pipe from the cold space will reduce the chances of freezing.



*Tenants away for break can permit water breaks to go unnoticed.*



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Another suggestion is to monitor the temperature in the space using an alarm. This could be part of the fire alarm system or a security system. Fixed temperature devices will notify a key holder when the temperature drops. This is especially helpful in the event of a heating system failure that can't always be predicted.

For sprinkler systems where pipes run through an attic and use "tented" insulation over the pipe, the temperature of the room the sprinkler is protecting must be maintained. The heat in this space goes through the drywall and is trapped by insulation, thus keeping the pipe warm. If you have maintenance work conducted in the attic at any time, check the pipe tenting to make sure that plastic or insulation hasn't been disturbed. I've seen this many times when the open chase makes an ideal area to run cable or internet

wiring and then left unsealed. If you have dry systems, verify before the cold weather arrives that the valves are intact and that water has not filled the dry system. Check low-point drains and drum drips to make sure the water is drained.

For the tenant areas, check doors and windows for openings or areas where cold air enters.

Be sure that windows open easily, as well as doors or other emergency egress features.

Suggest to the tenants to leave cupboard doors open to heat these areas and let the cold water on a slow drip to keep water moving through the pipes.



*Tented sprinkler pipe was exposed during maintenance, making it susceptible to freezing in the winter.*

Be careful not to obstruct exits or egress windows when weather proofing.



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For tenants that have control of their individual heat, consider the installation of thermostats with minimum limit settings. So, if a tenant turns the heat off or below the desired minimum the limit setting will automatically maintain the heat.

On the outside areas, have snow removal crews

be sure to clear snow from the fire escapes, fire hydrants, fire department connections and egress window wells. These are often forgotten areas when the sidewalks and driveways are being cleared. The longer the snow sits in these areas the most likely it will become frozen and nearly impossible to clear in an

emergency.

Use social media to share these cold weather reminders with tenants and their parents. Or, leave reminders at their doors. Most will be cooperative and will help to avoid freezing conditions as it could damage their belongings.

If you have other tips or ideas that are successful during the cold weather months please share these. We will highlight some of these in upcoming articles.

Stay warm!



*Snow removal crews have blocked access to the FDC and may have frozen it solid.*

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In this position he manages the Existing Structures Division that administers the fire and property maintenance code in all existing commercial and residential rental properties, and coordinates the life safety education for the community including off-campus and Greek housing.

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He is a frequent presenter at Campus Fire Forum, an instructor for the Fire-Wise Campus program and served as project manager for Campus Fire Data.



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