



How to Winterize a Vacation Home

If you have a weekend house you have to protect yourself year round from plumbing disasters. In the warmer months from April 15 to October 30th you need only turn off the water to the home. Think what would happen if you left the water on and just before you left to return to the city you used the powder room and the toilet never shut off. You weren't returning for a few weeks and when you did return it would be a disaster! Simply turning off the water prior to leaving, year round, will avert this disaster from happening. From October 30th. Till April 15th. The best insurance is to drain your plumbing and winterize. This will prevent a plumbing freeze from happening even if you loose your electric service or heat.

It is best to leave some heat in the house even if you completely drain the plumbing system. Mold and mildew will form from condensation; your upholstery will retain moisture and get mold and mildew forming.

Leaving the heat on at least 50 degrees will help eliminate this problem and the house will be much happier and so will you.

To drain and winterize the plumbing system follow the directions below. Every house has areas that may be difficult to drain. This is a basic description on the method to drain any house, but your house probably has some areas that may need additional attention.

Water System

1. Turn off electric supply to water system pump
2. Turn off electric to water heater if electric or Turn off gas supply if gas fired water heater.
3. Shut off water systems by shutting the valve if on municipal water.
4. Drain the pressure tank.
5. Open all faucets.
6. Disconnect all hoses from exterior faucets.
7. Open drain valve closest to the main shut off valve so water will drain out clear to the shut-off valve.
8. Drain pressure or holding tank.
9. Flush toilets and dip all water out of the flush tank. A hand bilge pump works well for this task.
10. Be sure to drain flexible spray hoses in showers and sinks
11. Open diverter valve to shower head so water drains out.
12. Drain water softeners so water will drain back from soft water pipes and controls. Brine tank will probably not freeze.
13. Drain any other water treatment equipment such as whole house filters, carbon filters, UV light filters, etc.
14. Drain water heaters.

Last step is to connect a compressor to the system and blow any remaining water out. You can purchase an inexpensive air compressor for this task. You will need to convert the air connector on the end of the compressors air hose to a water drain faucet fitting. This is easily done using plumbing fittings.

Do the above steps and you will be sure to come back to your weekend home with an intact plumbing system.

Heating Systems

Electric heating systems require no maintenance other than shutting off the power to the heating units. If you leave the heat on (recommended) be sure to leave at least a 6" clearance between the heaters and any combustible materials.

Hot air heating systems:

1. Turn off burner emergency switch which is often located at the top of the stairs.
2. Drain humidifier which is usually located on the furnace.
3. Circulated hot water and steam systems: Drain all water in the system unless the system contains anti-freeze. It is wise to have this type of system drained by a plumber unless you are well-informed on the procedures necessary.

Winterize your summer home as you do your winter home. To help conserve energy when the home is not occupied, install a low-heat thermostat. By doing this your home could be maintained at about 40 F. without a freeze-up, rather than at 55 F. which is the lowest temperature at which most thermostats can be set.

It is best to have some method of monitoring the temperatures in your home. You can install an alarm system and have the alarm company monitor the temperature for you. There are also many devices you can install to help you monitor the temperature yourself. Here are a couple of websites that sell devices that will monitor the temperatures in your home and contact you if you lose heat.

www.freezealarm.com

www.smarthome.com

Washer and dishwasher

Water left in hoses and internal components can cause damage when it freezes. Shut off water supply to clothes washer. Remove and drain inlet hoses. Clear water valve by setting timer for fill cycle. Press warm water button and run machine a few seconds. Drain water from drain hose. Disconnect electrical supply.

For a dishwasher, remove inlet and outlet connection to the valve. Operate valve to remove any water. Remove drain hose from the pump and drain. Disconnect electrical supply.

It is also a good idea to clean the equipment and to protect the finish with a coat of appliance polish.

Stored Items

1. Remove food, cosmetics, or medicine containers that contain liquid that would freeze from shelves.
2. Food in paper or plastic containers should be put in large metal containers to protect from mice or other rodents.
3. Remove or hide articles in the house that can be sold and converted to cash such as guns, radios, TV sets, tools or other valuables.

Sewage system

1. Force as much water as possible out of traps with a plunger.
2. Add environmentally safe antifreeze to each trap so you have at least a 50% solution.
3. Check for traps in these locations: kitchen sinks, bathroom sinks, bathtub and/or shower drains, toilets, washtubs, floor drains and maybe a sump pump.

Keep out animals

1. Cover chimneys tightly so that raccoons cannot enter the house, or birds fall down the chimney.
2. Stop up any places in the foundation or around the eaves where squirrels, chipmunks, mice or other small animals can enter.

Have someone check your house

It is always best to have someone look after your home when you are gone. Possibly a neighbor can periodically check your home and notify you if anything is amiss.

Enjoy your home knowing that you have done everything you can to protect your home when you are gone.