

BiZ Recommendation

Preparing Your Home or Vacation Home for Winter

Winter weather can cause serious damage if a home is not properly prepared, especially if the property will be vacant for an extended period. Use this checklist to help protect your home, prevent frozen pipes, and reduce the risk of costly winter-related repairs.

1. Plumbing & Water Protection

- ☐ Shut off the main water supply if the home will be vacant for an extended time.
- ☐ Drain water lines, especially in a vacation home or seasonal property.
- ☐ Open faucets after shutting off water to release pressure.
- ☐ Drain outdoor spigots and disconnect garden hoses.
- ☐ Install insulated covers on exterior faucets.
- ☐ Blow out sprinkler/irrigation lines if applicable.
- ☐ Add non-toxic plumbing antifreeze to sink, tub, shower, and floor drain traps if the home will be fully winterized.
- ☐ Drain or winterize the water heater if the water system is being shut down.
- ☐ Know where the main shutoff valve is in case of a burst pipe.
- ☐ Insulate exposed pipes in basements, crawl spaces, garages, and exterior walls.

2. Heating System

- ☐ Have the furnace or boiler serviced before winter.
- ☐ Replace furnace filters.
- ☐ Test the thermostat.
- ☐ Set the thermostat to at least **55°F** if the home will be vacant.
- ☐ Make sure vents and radiators are not blocked.
- ☐ Check that heat reaches bathrooms, laundry rooms, and rooms with plumbing.
- ☐ For vacation homes, consider a smart thermostat with low-temperature alerts.

3. Exterior & Roof

- ☐ Clean gutters and downspouts.
- ☐ Make sure downspouts direct water away from the foundation.
- ☐ Check roof for missing or damaged shingles.
- ☐ Inspect flashing around chimneys, skylights, and vents.
- ☐ Trim tree branches away from the roof and house.
- ☐ Check siding, windows, and doors for gaps or cracks.
- ☐ Seal exterior cracks where cold air or pests could enter.
- ☐ Store or secure patio furniture, grills, umbrellas, and planters.

4. Windows & Doors

- ☐ Check weatherstripping around doors.
- ☐ Caulk gaps around windows.
- ☐ Lock all windows.
- ☐ Close storm windows if applicable.
- ☐ Use door sweeps to reduce drafts.
- ☐ Close curtains or blinds for extra insulation and privacy.

5. Fireplace & Chimney

- ☐ Have the chimney cleaned and inspected.
- ☐ Make sure the damper opens and closes properly.
- ☐ Close the damper when the fireplace is not in use.
- ☐ Remove ashes safely.
- ☐ Keep firewood away from the house exterior to reduce pests.

6. Safety Checks

- ☐ Test smoke detectors.
- ☐ Test carbon monoxide detectors.
- ☐ Replace batteries if needed.
- ☐ Check fire extinguishers.
- ☐ Make sure emergency exits are clear.
- ☐ Leave emergency contact information with a trusted neighbor or property manager.
- ☐ For vacation homes, install leak sensors near water heater, sinks, toilets, and laundry areas.

7. Electrical & Appliances

- ☐ Unplug non-essential electronics.
- ☐ Turn off small appliances.
- ☐ Clean out refrigerator and freezer if power may be turned off.
- ☐ Leave refrigerator doors open if unplugged to prevent odors and mold.
- ☐ Shut off ice maker water line if leaving the home vacant.
- ☐ Make sure sump pump is working.
- ☐ Consider a battery backup for the sump pump.

8. Vacation Home / Extended Absence Checklist

- ☐ Shut off main water supply.
- ☐ Winterize or drain plumbing system.
- ☐ Set thermostat to around **55°F**, unless fully winterized.
- ☐ Remove all perishable food.
- ☐ Take out all trash.
- ☐ Lock all doors, windows, garage doors, and sheds.
- ☐ Set lights on timers or smart plugs.
- ☐ Pause mail and package deliveries.
- ☐ Arrange snow removal.
- ☐ Ask someone to check the property after storms or extreme cold.
- ☐ Confirm insurance coverage for vacant or seasonal property.
- ☐ Document the home's condition with photos before leaving.

9. Garage, Basement & Crawl Space

- ☐ Insulate pipes in unheated areas.
- ☐ Seal drafts around garage doors.
- ☐ Keep garage doors closed.
- ☐ Check basement for moisture or leaks.
- ☐ Clear floor drains.
- ☐ Make sure crawl space vents are closed or protected if appropriate for your home.

10. Final Walkthrough Before Leaving

- ☐ Water shut off or winterized.
- ☐ Thermostat set correctly.
- ☐ Doors and windows locked.
- ☐ Appliances unplugged or turned off.
- ☐ Trash removed.
- ☐ Lights/timers set.
- ☐ Alarm/security system activated (if equipped).
- ☐ Neighbor or property manager notified.
- ☐ Emergency contact info shared.
- ☐ Photos taken for records.

BiZ Tip

If the property will be empty during freezing weather, consider having a licensed plumber professionally winterize the water system. This is one of the best ways to help prevent frozen pipes, water damage, and expensive repairs.