

BERNICA

Beating the freeze

Your guide to keeping your
home warm and safe



Investing
in homes

Beating the freeze

Let's get ready – top tips

With another winter on the way, let's be a little better prepared. Here are a few hints, tips and facts to help keep you and your home safe and warm during the cold weather.

- Our heating appliances are serviced every year, but if you have missed your appointment...
- Make sure you know where your stopcock is located and that it's working, if not...
- Test your smoke alarm to check it's working, if not...



Call Bernicia on 0344 800 3800

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- Keep simple cold, flu and sore throat remedies in the house. Ask your local pharmacy if they offer a prescription pick up and delivery service
 - Make sure you claim all the financial support you can to help with heating bills. For useful numbers see pages 18 and 19
 - Have your electric blanket serviced, this should be done every three years
 - Keep a stock of basic food items in the cupboard and freezer in case it's too cold to go shopping
 - Keep a mixture of salt and sand handy to put on paths and steps in icy weather. Remember shops and super-markets often run out of salt.

For government advice on clearing snow and ice from footpaths and pavements yourself, please follow 'the snow code' at www.gov.uk



Stay well

Dress warmly by:

- Wearing plenty of thin layers, rather than one thick one
- Putting on a coat, hat, scarf, gloves and warm shoes when you go outside
- Wearing clothes made of wool, cotton or fleecy synthetic fibres
- Wearing warm clothes in bed. In very cold weather, wear thermal underwear, bed socks and even a hat – a lot of heat is lost through your head.

Stay healthy by:

- Getting an annual flu jab, contact your GP or talk to your pharmacist if you think you might qualify
- Eating well, have plenty of hot food and drinks, plan your meals and keep your diet as varied as possible and aim to eat five portions of fruit and veg daily
- Staying active, don't sit or stand for long periods, you'll quickly get cold
- Move around at least once an hour.

Stay safe by:

- Choosing boots with non-slip soles, slips and falls are the biggest cause of injury in winter
- Keeping steps and paths free of ice. Sprinkle them with a mixture of salt and sand if the ground is icy
- Considering fitting a grab rail if you have several steps at your front or back door. We may be able to help with this
- Checking local news and weather forecasts for advice when bad weather is on its way
- Looking out for elderly friends and neighbours.

Beating the freeze

Stay warm

During the day, you should try to:

- Get to know how the timer and thermostat on your heating system work. In very cold weather, set your heating to come on earlier, rather than turn the thermostat up. This means you won't be cold while you wait for your home to heat up.
- Close the curtains at dusk and if possible, fit thermal linings. This will keep the heat in
- Heat all the rooms you use in the day
- Make sure you keep your living room warm throughout the day and heat your bedroom before going to bed
- Don't block up air vents, as fires and heaters need ventilation. Good ventilation also helps to prevent condensation.



Heat your main living room to around

18 – 21°C

(64 - 69°F)



Heat the rest of your house to at least

16°C

(61°F).



At night, you should try to:

- Never use hot water bottles in the same bed as an electric blanket, even if the electric blanket is switched off
- Unplug electric blankets before you go to bed, unless they have a thermostatic control for safe all night use
- Get your electric blanket tested every three years for safety, Age UK or the local fire and rescue service may be able to provide advice or help you with this
- Open the window or door a little at night for ventilation if you use a heater in your bedroom in winter.



Try to keep the temperature above
18°C
(64°F)
in your bedroom overnight

Beating the freeze

Protect your home

When weather becomes very cold, the water pipes in your home can freeze. This may lead to a burst pipe in the thaw, which can cause a lot of damage to your home and belongings.

Tips to prevent frost damage:

- Keep your home reasonably warm during the day and night. During cold weather keep your heating on. If you have thermostatic radiator valves (TRV's) with an anti-frost setting, make sure it is used.
- If your water tank and pipes are located in the roof space, let warm air circulate into this area by keeping the loft hatch open slightly
- Keep the cupboard door under the sink open
- Keep room doors slightly open to allow warm air to move around the house
- Report any dripping taps or overflows.





How do I find my stopcock?

- The stopcock is a valve for turning off and on the cold water supply to your home. Turn the stopcock in a clockwise direction to shut the water supply off. You can turn the water supply back on by turning the stopcock in an anti-clockwise direction.
- Stopcocks are usually found in your kitchen, below the kitchen sink or in the ground floor bathroom. It is important that you know where the stopcock is and that you check that your stopcock is working.

How do I check my stopcock?

- Run the cold water tap in your kitchen and turn the stopcock in a clockwise direction to check if the cold water turns off
- If you find it difficult to turn or it isn't working, call us on **0344 800 3800**
- If you cannot find the stopcock you can call us and make an appointment for a maintenance officer to visit your home and show you where it is.

What to do if your pipes freeze:

- Turn the water off at the stopcock
- Thaw along the pipe, starting from the end nearest the tap
- Put hot water bottles or a thick cloth soaked in hot water over the frozen pipe or use an electric hair dryer at its lowest setting to thaw the pipes. Be careful not to warm them too quickly or they may burst. Do not use a blow torch or any naked flame.

Beating the freeze

What to do if a pipe bursts:

- Turn off the stopcock by turning it clockwise
- Try and block the escaping water with towels or other thick cloths
- Turn off your central heating, immersion heater and any other water heating systems. If the central heating uses solid fuel, let the fire die out.
- Once you have shut down your water heating, turn on all your taps to drain down the system, flushing your toilet will also help
- If water leaks near anything electrical, switch off the mains electricity immediately. If the mains switch is wet, don't touch it as you risk electrocution!
- If water has been leaking through for some time and the ceilings are bulging, rooms may not be safe to enter. If you notice the leak quickly, you can catch leaking water in buckets. If the ceiling has just started to bulge, you could punch a small hole in it with a screwdriver to release the water.
- Warn your neighbours in case it affects them
- Don't forget to turn off your taps once the problem is fixed.



Call Bernicia on 0344 800 3800



With new condensing, high efficiency boilers, frozen condensate pipes are a common problem in winter months. Here is a short guide to help you thaw your frozen gas boiler condensate waste pipe in a safe and easy manner.

The purpose of the condensate pipe is to vent moisture from your boiler safely to the external environment. In cold weather the condensate pipe can freeze, even if insulated. If this happens your boiler will automatically shut down and leave you without central heating and hot water.

There are a couple of ways to tell if your condensate pipe is frozen. You may hear some bubbling sounds coming from your boiler or the pipe itself. There may be a warning light or fault code flashing on your boiler indicating that the pipe is frozen.

The condensate drainage pipe is a plastic pipe (typically grey or white in colour) coming from the bottom of your boiler. It is likely that this pipe is frozen if:

- Outside temperatures have been below freezing for some time
- The condensate pipe runs through the wall and outside the property for part of its length, typically discharging into a gulley drain
- The boiler has previously been working satisfactorily.

If the pipe freezes you should report this.

Beating the freeze

Our step-by-step guide to thawing a condensate waste pipe



Warm some water in the kettle (do not use boiling water as this could crack the pipe or scald you).



Stand away from the wall and gently pour the warm water onto the frozen pipe.



Repeat until the pipe has thawed.

WARNING Do not rush thawing the pipe by using water that is too hot.

- Always ensure that you are standing at ground level when pouring the water onto the pipe
- Never disconnect the pipe
- Always use suitable protection for your hands when handling hot water
- Once the blockage has been thawed and cleared, consult the boiler operating instructions on any action needed to 'reset' the fault code/warning light and start the boiler
- In most cases, once the condensate pipe is cleared and a reset has been carried out, the boiler will reignite using an automatic operating sequence. If the reset/restart does not work call **0344 800 3800** to report the problem.



Beating the winter blues

Going on Holiday

If you are away this winter you should keep your central heating on at a low level and leave the loft hatch open slightly to allow warm air to circulate in the loft space. If you require assistance to drain down your heating system/turn off your water supply, please call us on **0344 800 3800** and we will arrange this for you. Seven to ten day's notice is required and you must advise us when you will be returning so that we can make arrangements to refill your system.

Remember you must not light your central heating boiler before your system is refilled.

If you expect low temperatures while you are away, pour some salt into the toilet pan and other waste pipes

to stop the water from freezing. Do not forget to make arrangements for emergency access to your home before your leave. If you are going away for an extended period, you should provide us with a contact number and an address of a key holder to your property. Ask someone to check your home regularly while you are away.

If you have any concerns about a property that you think may be empty that we don't know about, please call us immediately. Unprotected properties in severe weather can cause damage to other homes through frozen pipes and bursts.

Beating the freeze

Home Contents Insurance

We strongly recommend you obtain insurance for damage to furniture and fittings, personal possessions and redecoration. Bernicia does not insure your belongings and has no responsibility to assist in drying out or replacing your furniture etc.

Bernicia tenants have access to the SIMPLE Tenants Home Contents Insurance Scheme. This offers an easy, low cost way for tenants to protect their household effects. Details can be found on our website www.bernicia.com or provided by calling **0344 800 3800**.

Do it before it's too late.





Our promise to you

In extreme weather you may be affected by heating failures, frozen or burst pipes or damage to gutters and roofs. We will aim to respond as quickly as possible during such times:

- Our main telephone lines will be open 8.30am - 5.00pm, Monday to Friday
- An emergency out-of-hours telephone service will operate seven days per week, 365 days per year
- The Community Alarm Service will provide 24 hour contact for those linked to this service
- We will call anyone who is known to us as being elderly, in poor health or disabled and who is not linked to the Community Alarm Service, to check if they need any help or assistance
- We are not responsible for clearing snow and gritting roads and paths. It is the responsibility of the local Council to clear main carriageways (as a priority). We will carry out gritting and limited clearing on access routes to sheltered housing schemes.

Beating the freeze

Our repairs service may have to operate on an emergency basis, if this is the case:

- Appointments already made for routine work may have to be deferred, we will contact you to let you know and if possible rearrange
- Appointments for newly reported non urgent jobs, may be made outside the normal response times
- We will do our best to attend to total heating failures within one working day
- If we cannot fix your heating, we will provide temporary heating until this can be done
- We will aim to attend to burst pipes, where the flow of water cannot be contained, as quickly as possible.

Please remember that extreme weather conditions slows down travelling times between jobs and affects our ability to carry out external works to roofs, gutters etc.



Don't waste money

Energy prices are rising, so here are some basic tips that can help save energy and money.



Heating

Turn down your thermostat by just 1°C and you'll cut your fuel bills by up to 10%.



Lighting

Use energy saving light bulbs, they last 10 times longer than ordinary bulbs and using one can save you around £55 over the lifetime of the bulb. Always turn off lights when you leave a room.



Cooking

Keep a lid on it – the saucepan that is. Use just enough water to cover vegetables, not a full pan, and try using the microwave instead of the oven – that'll save money too. When using your kettle only boil as much water as needed, but remember if this is an electric kettle make sure the element is covered.



Washing

Washing at 30°C uses about 40% less electricity than at a higher temperature. Try to wash full loads. If you can't, use a half load or economy programme instead.

Beating the freeze



Appliances

Look out for the energy efficiency rating whenever you buy new appliances. 'A' rated appliances are the most efficient and cheapest to run.



Standby

Don't leave appliances on standby and remember not to leave laptops and mobile phones on charge unnecessarily.



Taps

A dripping hot water tap wastes energy and in one week wastes enough hot water to fill half a bath, so make sure any repairs are reported and taps are fully turned off.



Curtains

Closing curtains, especially lined ones, will stop heat escaping through your windows.



Energy savings

Consider fuel switching.



Don't get all steamed up

What is condensation?

There is always some moisture in the air, even if you can't see it. You notice it when you see your breath on a cold day, or when the mirror mists over when you have a bath. Condensation occurs mainly during cold weather, it appears on cold surfaces and in places where there is little movement of air. Generally it occurs in corners, on or near windows, in or behind wardrobes and cupboards.

How to avoid condensation

Produce less moisture

- Cover pans and do not leave kettles boiling
- Dry washing outdoors on a line, or put it in the bathroom with the door closed and the window open
- Do not dry clothes on a radiator
- Vent any tumble dryer on the outside, unless it is the self condensing type.

Keep your home warm

- Maintain a low background heat, this needn't mean increased heating costs.

Ventilate to remove moisture

- Keep a small window ajar or a trickle ventilator open when someone is in the room
- Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms when in use by opening the windows wider. Or better still, use a humidistat controlled electric fan
- Close the kitchen and bathroom doors when these rooms are in use, even if your kitchen or bathroom has an extractor fan
- Wipe away moisture if it settles.

Some words of warning

- Do not block permanent ventilators.

For more information, please refer to our leaflet 'Damp, mould and condensation'.

Beating the freeze

Useful contacts

Health and wellbeing for older people

Age UK



Phone:
free on 0800 169 65 65



Online:
[www.ageuk.org.uk/
healthandwellbeing](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing)

Cold weather and winter fuel payments



Online:
www.gov.uk

Advice on energy savings

Energy helpline



Phone:
free on 0800 074 0745



Online:
www.energyhelpline.com



Weather



Online:
www.metoffice.gov.uk or local news stations

Health

NHS



Phone:
111



Online:
www.nhs.uk

Northumbria Water

Bursts outside your home



Phone:
0345 717 1100



Online:
www.nwl.co.uk

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