

## **Not bitter, but still darn cold**

### **Good news for ice fishermen, bad news for water pipes**

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For the caller, it was a tragedy. But for Colleen Rogan, a plumber and dispatcher at a local plumbing shop, it was the same old story.

On the other end of the line was an Ocean City beach house owner in a frenzy. She was having guests over for a party on a chilly January evening, Rogan said.

She hadn't been in the house all winter, and when she turned on the water to her kitchen faucet, nothing came out. The pipes were frozen.

'Tis the season for chilled piping.

Most homeowners are so busy getting ready to high-tail it out of town after Labor Day — scrubbing the sand out of the shower, carefully packing beach chairs into the shed and cursing the weather once it dips below 80 degrees — that they forget to shut off their water mains.

On Friday and Saturday, Wilson Leo Plumbing and Heating had at least 20 calls come in about frozen pipes, Rogan said. Dean Ragone, from Allrisk Property Damage Experts in Avalon, said his company had more than 25 calls last week.

In the case of the botched party, Rogan could tell the home owner only what she tells everyone else.

"Turn off the water," she said. "Jack up the heat, open kitchen cabinets, open up bathroom cabinets and jack up the heat some more."

Wilson Leo plumbers — like many in the area — don't try to thaw frozen pipes. Many said they get blamed too quickly for leaks and damage when the defrost job is over.

After all, most pipe leaks and water damage comes after ice is thawed.

That's not likely going to happen soon. Even though the cold snap that's recently gripped the region is sputtering out, temperatures will stay around the freezing level well into next week.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shows colder temperatures over the next few days, with the possibility of snow listed for Monday night through Wednesday.

Both today and Monday will be a touch above the freezing level, according to NOAA. Today's high should reach about 35 degrees with sunny skies, and Monday should top out at 40 degrees with chances of rain and snow.

On Tuesday, it's 50 percent likely to snow. That chance drops to 30 percent Wednesday.

Although Wilson Leo plumbers won't thaw pipes out, they'll make a recommendation, Rogan said.

"We'll come over to see if the freeze is in the main, or if it's somewhere close to house," she said. "If it's out toward the street, you might be out of luck."

Ragone, from the property damage company, received a call last week from a nursing home in the region whose sprinkler system froze up in the recent weather.

"They thawed out, section by section," Ragone said. "They had to call us in three days in a row. The water was gushing out like there was a real fire."

Sometimes, Ragone said, condominium or apartment owners need to work together. Allrisk gets many calls, he said, from duplex dwellers whose neighbors forgot to turn off their water. The result affects both units.

"That's especially a problem with some of the cookie-cutter units built in the shore towns," he said. "They're not insulated very well. People don't realize that wind or drafts near pipes helps them freeze even faster."

Another factor people do not realize, until an invoice is in their face, is the cost of thawing or repairing frozen pipes.

Plumbers like Wilson Leo automatically charge \$98 for a service call. And in the event of property damage due to water, Ragone has seen costs rise run between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

That price tag hit a house where the walls were removed to prevent mold from accumulating, Ragone said. That was after a frozen pipe thawed, sprung a leak and ran for three days.

"It shouldn't be out of sight, out of mind," Ragone said. "Frozen pipes could lead to devastating situations."

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