

Reduce chances of your septic system freezing

A combination of cold weather and lack of snow is one reason home septic systems can freeze.

Other reasons include irregular use, leaking plumbing fixtures or a pipe that's not installed with the proper change of elevation. If the soil over a pipe is compacted, the elevation of the pipe may shift, causing a loss of gravity flow. This results in water left standing in pipes, and the water can easily freeze.

Here are some ways to reduce chances of a frozen septic system:

- Provide insulation by adding an 8-12-inch layer of mulch, leaves or loose hay or straw over the pipes, tank and soil treatment area.
- Make sure all risers, inspection pipes and manholes have properly fitting caps with no cracks.
- Avoid pumping the septic tank going into the winter months, the bacteria in the septic tank is what keeps the septic tank warm in the winter months.
- Keep Mound septic systems with grass cover later in the year but avoid letting them get weed filled. Canada thistle and other noxious weeds tend to have long root channels which allow frost to penetrate deeper through the septic system than perennial grasses. Thick perennial grass left to a dense mat later in the fall months provides a good cover but unmaintained weed cover is not desired and can cause freezing issues.
- Keep all types of heavy traffic off the system. This includes family activities, snowmobiles and ATV [vehicles](#). This is especially important in winter, but is also a good rule to follow all year. Compacted snow can lead to freezing in the soil treatment area.
- Use normal amounts of water - the warmer, the better.
- Plan ahead if you're going to be gone for an extended period. This could include pumping the tank before leaving, or in the case of a lake cabin, not returning until warmer weather.
- Fix any leaky plumbing. Slow drips cause the icicle effect in pipes and they will eventually freeze solid which tends to cause pipe cracking.
- High-efficiency furnaces produce a small drip of water. This trickle of water can freeze in the pipes, since there is no velocity to push the water into the tank. It is best to re-route this into a sump pump or directly outdoors.
- Since most systems depend on gravity flow, have the pipes televised by a septic professional if you suspect improper slopes to the pipes.