



PLUMBING

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Hokkaido's cold winters, combined with poor insulation, can wreak havoc on your pipes. To avoid burst pipes and cracked toilets, learn how to drain the pipes before winter hits (Sept / Oct). When temperatures get below zero be prepared to drain your pipes, especially if you plan to be out of your house for a length of time.

Someone from the office, or even the local plumber, is the best source of information about your plumbing, but there is some general information that you should be aware of.

There is at least one main valve, and sometimes more, in the house or apartment. Switch it to off while the water is running in one tap. Once main valve is switched off, open all of the taps in your home, including the washing machine, toilet, sinks and bathtub. Some taps will have a little knob that allows air into the pipe; some knobs are only loosened while others should be taken off completely.

The water heater (boiler) requires special care. Leave it on a warm setting at all times during the winter so the inside doesn't freeze. The pipes to and from the heater need draining. In some cases, the boiler can be turned off and on. To avoid freezing during the winter, leave it on all the time. There may be a little knob that needs to be pressed a few times each month to avoid clogging and water back up. Ask your supervisor or the person responsible for your accommodations to explain these procedures to you. Most people have hand-held showers. In this case, to drain the hose, put the head down on a lower level, like in the tub.

When you return home, just reverse the above process. *Before* you turn on the main valve, remember to shut off all the valves and taps you opened. Even if you are home during the evenings take some precautions. Turn off the main valve during the day, and do the whole draining process during the coldest weeks.

Be sure to *winterize* your house well. Close all vents, and tape plastic on the windows, if you don't have double insulation. The vents that you will want to block

off are on the outside of your house; either pile snow or place a board in front of them, if they do not have coverings. Look for places where TV and telephone cables come into the house; sometimes these are just holes punched in the wall. Pack paper or steel wool around the hole. If you are in an apartment, ask the landlord if there is anything else you should be doing. Leave the curtains open during the day to allow sunlight to 'warm' the house. Pour anti-freeze into the toilet bowl whilst away. Keep a small heater in your toilet area.

Despite all measures, sometimes the pipes do freeze up. If they burst, call a plumber or your supervisor right away. If they are simply frozen, and the water doesn't flow, you can try turning the heat on high for the night. Put a fan next to the main valve blowing away from the pipe. Hot air will be drawn from the ceiling across the pipes and onto the floor. With luck, the water will be flowing in the morning. Good luck, and remember: spring comes in March!

As always, the official [hajet|forum](#) is where you will find all the answers to any questions you may have regarding life in Hokkaido.

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