

# 2012 Winter Warning (Burst Pipes)

**With very low temperatures forecast for the next few weeks, there are a number of actions that schools should consider in order to manage the risks from severe weather.**

Burst pipes can have a devastating effect on your school. Apart from the initial clear up and drying out process, which can be extensive and distressing, there can follow months of disruption from contractors that will require temporary workarounds and frustration.



The main risk period is clearly the festive holiday break when schools close down or have reduced occupancy. Two years ago during the festive break the Insurance Team dealt with 58 claims from schools that had suffered damage from burst pipes. This was an unprecedented number and cost the Council's insurance fund over £500,000.



Ceiling panels brought down by a burst pipe in the roof

When severe cold weather corresponds with the festive break the risk is increased. Since we have no control over the weather it is important to make sure that everything that can be done to reduce the risk is being done.

Listed below are a number of general and specific precautions that we recommend schools carry out in order to manage the risks as far as reasonably practicable. This can be used as a checklist for site managers and to provide reassurance to governors.

## General

- Ensure heating systems receive regular maintenance
- Check and ensure all at risk water pipes and taps (external, in roof spaces, etc.) are properly lagged. Roof spaces in particular can get very cold as they have to be ventilated, increasing the risk to water tanks and cold water pipes
- Ensure water tanks are lagged
- Check for leaks and drips especially from overflows as these could indicate a problem and then get them repaired
- Ensure you are aware of the location of stopcocks for the main school, mobiles and other external buildings
- Check that your business continuity and emergency plans are up to date with appropriate actions and accurate contact numbers, look on Norfolk Schools website for more information or e-mail [businesscontinuity@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:businesscontinuity@norfolk.gov.uk).
- Be aware that items of stock, equipment and consumables stored unprotected below 300mm above floor level may not be insured if damaged by water

**Before closing down for the Xmas holiday** (particularly if the school will be unoccupied for most or all of the entire holiday period)

- Ensure heating system thermostats are working and the system remains on at around 10°C during the holiday
- Ensure there are sufficient levels of Oil/LPG in the tanks to fuel the heating system for the holiday period
- Turn water off at main stop cocks and any external isolation valves to mobiles or other external buildings
- Open taps in toilets and kitchens to drain water from pipes (only necessary if building to remain unoccupied)
- Make regular checks on the school during the holiday if low temperatures occur
- Open hatches to loft spaces to allow warmer air to circulate

### **On return from holiday**

- Keep water supply turned off while bringing the temperatures up to normal levels
- Close all taps and open the stopcocks and check for any leaks
- Check for any leaks as rooms warm up and pipes thaw
- If a pipe or joint has fractured, do not turn the supply back on, instead contact a plumber



**another classroom out of action**

### **If internal flooding is discovered**

- Notify the insurance section on 01603 222839. BMP3 members should also contact their Service Contractors on the emergency numbers provided
- Be safe, assess the situation but do not take any unnecessary risks
- If water is near to electrical equipment or switch gear, isolate the electrics
- Remove any electrical items from the affected area and put them in a ventilated area where they can dry out. Do not use them until they have been tested.
- Remove any wooden or composite furniture from wet flooring
- Do not throw away water damaged items until you have spoken to Insurance
- Take advice given to you by Insurance and Norfolk Property Services

It is recognised that some of the above precautions might create a small amount of extra work for some schools. However this must be balanced against both the financial, emotional and operational costs of recovery from burst pipe damage.

By carrying out pre holiday checks and rectifying any problems discovered, you will go along way to ensuring that your school does not suffer damage and disruption. Back this up with regular checks on the premises during the holiday if very low temperatures exist and you should be able to open at the start of the new term as normal.