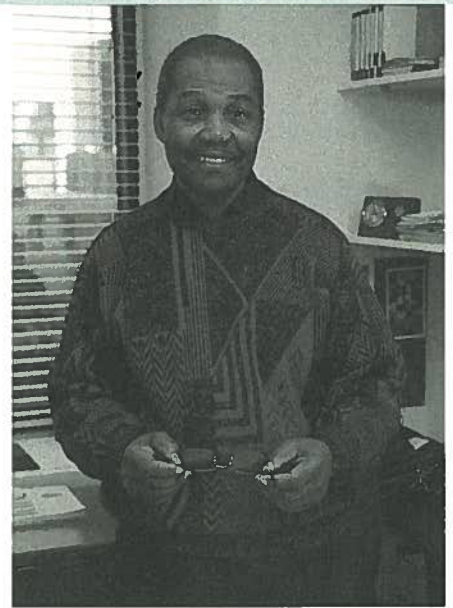


TIPS FROM TAFT: Surviving the economic downturn

Landlord, it's freezing in here!

Q: Taft, winter is just around the corner and I know that means I'm looking at some monster heating bills for my building unless I do something. Any ideas?

A: Frozen pipes are probably the most common cold-weather problem that building owners face. Water expands as it freezes and eventually pipes — whether they're PVC plastic, galvanized or copper — give way. The most susceptible pipes are ones that take water to outside faucets or sprinkling systems. Burst pipes can ruin floors, rugs, furniture and other belongings. There will be added distress caused to your tenants by inconveniencing them when water is shut off while the repairs are being made.



Taft West, Director of Property Management Training

To prevent these headaches, try the following:

- Consider having a plumber relocate exposed pipes.
- Insulate and seal your basement and crawl spaces.
- Before the first freeze, drain sprinkler supply lines and shut off outside faucets. Do not use antifreeze solutions in these pipes unless instructed to do so by the manufacturer. Antifreeze is harmful to humans, pets and landscaping.
- Disconnect hoses from outdoor faucets, drain them and store them indoors. Turn off the valves that control the water supply to these faucets and open the faucets a bit to allow any stored water to drain.
- Insulate pipes that run through unheated spaces, including those that carry hot water. These pipes can freeze when the hot water heater is not operating.
- Keep the building temperature at levels required by local ordinances. In Chicago, the heating season runs from September 15 to June 1. During this season, a minimum temperature of 68 degrees is required from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. From 10:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. the minimum is 66 degrees.
- When weather is bitterly cold, open doors to cabinets and sinks that house pipes; this allows warm air into these spaces and will prevent occasional freezing of the pipes.

Follow these suggestions throughout the winter to keep out the cold:

- Clean gutters and downspouts in late autumn — after the leaves have fallen. This prevents ice blockage and helps runoff.
- Check areas that let in cold air, such as basements, crawl spaces, attics, garages, and spaces under kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Caulk any open cracks or add insulation.
- Check to make sure storm windows are shut tight and locked; unlocked windows can be pushed up by strong winds and quickly lower the temperature. Seal window drafts with caulk.
- Remove window air conditioners or insulate the units by: a) removing the front panel; b) inserting plastic sheeting inside; and c) replacing the panel and covering the unit.
- If the building will be empty during the winter, get a plumber to drain your water system.
- Have an emergency kit available: flashlight with extra batteries, first-aid kit, heavy gloves.
- Obtain tenants' phone numbers and make sure they have your emergency contact number and numbers for the community's emergency services.

In these tough times, managing multifamily property is more of a challenge than ever. Taft West, CIC Director of Property Management Training, has more than 30 years experience in property management. "Tips from Taft" is part of a series of articles on how to weather the economic storm.

PROPERTY OWNERS AND MANAGERS

Send YOUR questions to
AskTaft@cicchicago.com