



THE VILLAGE OF SOUTH RIVER'S GUIDE TO FROZEN WATER SERVICES

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

The winter of 2015 will not be one most Ontarians will soon forget. The prolonged, extreme cold weather conditions during the months of January and February caused an unprecedented number of frozen water pipes in homes and businesses as well as frozen water services and frozen water mains. Communities both large and small, across the province shared this difficult situation with the Village of South River. Cities such as Toronto, Hamilton, Guelph, Barrie, Sudbury, Ottawa, Niagara Falls, North Bay and the communities of Smith Falls, Wiarton, Kincardine, Elmira and Halton Region, to name just a few, experienced the same frustrations and challenges related to frozen water services

A total of eighty-four (84) customers of the Village's five hundred and five (505) customers were affected by the extreme winter conditions. Of those eighty-four customers, fifty-one (51) were frozen at some point during the winter. Thirty (30) of the customers who froze had a bleeder hose running. Twenty-one (21) customers froze who did not have a bleeder hose running. On the positive side thirty-three (33) customers had a bleeder hose installed and did not freeze.

During the months following the frozen water pipe crisis the Village Council and staff have been busy taking a close look at what we've learned from the experience and applying that knowledge to finding ways to reduce the impact on the public, our staff and the budget for the future.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

- A new filter media was installed at the Water Treatment Plant to ensure optimum filter performance. Several other equipment upgrades took place at the plant; some were planned for 2015 and others were planned for the future but moved up on the implementation schedule in order to help the water treatment plant function with more efficacy during such a crisis.
- The Public Works Department purchased a jackhammer for digging through frost and pavement to reach frozen pipes and water mains. The Public Works department also purchased additional thawing equipment.
- This fall the administration office began working to have a new website designed which will improve our ability to post accurate updates and instructions in "real" time.
- The Village of South River has purchased the **CodeRed System** of mass notification to better communicate the situation to the public. It is to your advantage to sign-up for this service. Register online at www.srmfd.com or call (705) 386-0066.
- The administration reached out to other affected communities to share and receive information and ideas as to how to deal with this type of future situation. Policies have been established regarding the owner's responsibilities and the municipality's responsibilities and a public

education program will be started annually to remind and advise the public of these responsibilities.

HELPFUL FACTS FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

- Administration was provided with information regarding the ***LAS Sewer and Water Line Warranty Service*** which it would like to pass along to interested customers. Home owners are responsible for the water service lines inside their homes and businesses as well as the portion of the water service located between the building and the property line. The Village of South River is responsible for the service located between the property line and the water main. The ***LAS Sewer and Water Line Warranty Service*** is an insurance which will protect residents from stress and high cost repairs. Service Line Warranty Canada program operates in the USA as a “National League of Cities” program. 200+ US cities participate. The company was introduced in Canada via the City of Hamilton in 2014. The company offers two products: 1) external water line warranty and 2) external sewer line warranty. It provides protection from the point of entry at the home to the municipal line. For additional information please contact the municipal office or visit the program’s website at www.slwofc.ca This information has been provided to you as a courtesy and participation in the program is a decision for the property owner alone.
- The Village of South River wishes to partner with the property owners to work together to find ways to mitigate the severity of future water service freeze-ups. This partnership is not a guarantee an event like we experienced last winter situation will never occur again; Mother Nature has the final say in weather-related issues. However, working together to find appropriate mitigation measures and communicating well with each other will go a long way toward making the situation more bearable for everyone during the crisis and into the future.
- Frost depth is the depth to which the ground is frozen. In South River, frost depth usually does not reach the level of our buried water infrastructure. However, with extremely cold conditions, frost may reach these levels towards the end of winter, usually in late February or early March, which was the case last winter. Frost depth was recorded in some areas of our Village to greater than seven (7) feet deep. In early spring, it may seem warmer, but frost is still deep in the ground and remains as long as the temperature continues to drop below freezing at night.
- Our water comes from the South River. With water already being cold as it enters our water distribution system, it takes very little exposure to colder temperatures for it to freeze. That is why it is important to make sure your water service lines are not exposed to colder air during the winter months
- Some of the municipal water lines are already insulated. Even some of these insulated pipes froze last year.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Disconnect and drain all outdoor hoses in the fall;
- Shut off and drain all outdoor faucets;
- Make sure all outdoor faucets are in working order and easily accessible;
- Insulate all exposed outside water pipes with specially designed foam pipe covers available at building supply or home improvement stores;
- Seal air leaks throughout your home and garage;
- Open kitchen, bathroom and laundry cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. If piping is located next to exterior walls, leave the cupboard doors under your kitchen and bathroom sinks open. Please take care to remove household cleaners and other items that could harm children or pets while the cupboard doors are open;
- Keep garage doors closed if there are water supply lines in the garage;

- Check your water every hour or so. If it starts to appear coloured or changes in pressure occur, let the tap run until it returns to normal, then turn off the tap again;
- Do not plow snow off the area where the water lines or the septic system is buried. Snow can act as an insulator;
- Contact your insurance provider for information on how to protect your home from damage following frozen water service, whether the issue is related to household plumbing or service lines. Every insurance plan could be different so your agent is the best person to provide you with advice on what to do to ensure you will be covered should any damage occur as a result of frozen water impacts;
- Sign up for **CodeRed** for improved notification service.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A WATER SERVICE FREEZES?

- Not every household is at risk. Please call the Village of South River if:
 - You have a history of frozen water service, and
 - You are experiencing unusually low water pressure, and
 - You have unusually cold water (less than 5C) running from your tap.
- If you have a history of frozen water service please purchase a garden hose at any hardware supply or home improvement store. Alternatively, the Village of South River has a supply of hoses from last winter which it will loan to property owners on a “first come first serve” basis. Make arrangements to either borrow a municipally-owned hose or purchase one from a hardware store early as last winter demand was high and supply was low. Please do not run the water tap continuously unless Village Public Works staff has requested you do so. Public Works staff will arrange to visit your property when you are home and will attach your hose and set the correct water flow. **You will sign a document acknowledging the water flow has been set in your presence and any change in flow (turning down or off) may result in your water service freezing and any and all repairs and labour charges will be the responsibility of the property owner.** Only customers with documents signed by the property owner and returned to the municipal office by Public Works will receive a credit for the additional water usage. **If you run water without direction from the Village, you will not receive a reduction on your water consumption charges.**
- If you think your water service is frozen the first step is to try to determine if it is your indoor plumbing that has frozen. Try running different cold water taps throughout your home. If more than one has running water while others don’t, your issue is likely internal. You should call a licensed plumber for assistance. If you find that all water service to your home has stopped, or you aren’t sure where the problem is, **contact the Village of South River during regular business hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.) at 705-386-2573. If calling after hours, leave a message at (705) 386-0245.** The Village will work with you to determine where the cause of the frozen service is located, including, where necessary, conducting an on-site investigation. Please note that due to high volume of calls, investigations may be delayed until the following day, or longer.
- If you contact a plumber to restore water and the freezing occurs on the private side of the property line **the property owner will pay to the contractor the costs for restoring the water service.**
- If you contact the Village of South River Public Works staff to restore water where the freezing occurs on the private side of the property line, **the Village will charge the homeowner for the costs to restore the water service.** The Village of South River has maintained a record of service calls to residences and commercial properties with frozen water lines in 2015 for future reference and will work with these customers to proactively manage this issue.

- If the freezing occurs on the municipal side of the property line the Village of South River will pay for the costs to restore the water service and the property owner will not be charged.
- Municipalities are not responsible for expenses and/or damages which are incurred as a result of freezing water services and the possible leaks associated with burst or thawing pipes. Property owners are strongly encouraged to contact your property insurance broker for advice and assistance.
- If your water service is frozen please be patient. Private contractors and public works staff worked long hours during the winter of 2015 in order to get to everyone as quickly as possible. With so many other communities experiencing the same situation it was difficult to find an available private contractor in the region.
- There is no “average” time to thaw a water service. Each property may experience different issues depending on how and when the building was constructed; the type and condition of the plumbing; as well as where the freezing occurs. All of these factors make it difficult to know how many customers will have water restored each day or how long the waiting period may be.
- In some cases, where all efforts have been exhausted and the water service cannot be restored, it is most likely due to the frost being too deep and surrounding the water mains. In these extreme cases the water service will not be restored until temperatures stay above freezing during the nights for several nights consecutively and the ground around water service lines have thawed in order for water to start running again. That can mean a property could be without water until spring.
- In the winter of 2015 neighbours volunteered to help out their neighbours by agreeing to have a temporary water line connected between two properties. This is a gesture of goodwill between neighbours and is very appreciated by those who have a frozen water service, however, it is not a requirement.
- The same is true for those neighbours who offer to supply water to neighbours with frozen water services. This is not a requirement but an act of kindness in challenging times. **DO NOT** provide containers for neighbours to carry water. Instead, have your neighbours provide their own containers so you are not responsible for providing a container which may be contaminated and make your neighbour ill.
- There will **NOT** be a credit for those who share a temporary line or supply water to others.
- Depending on the severity of the situation the Village of South River may make arrangements to have potable water available at both the Fire Hall and the Arena. Containers will not be provided.
- The Arena was also open to provide shower facilities to residents with a frozen water service at no charge.
- Our community stepped up and found ways to look after one another through this difficult and stressful time. It is important for us all to review the lessons which were learned during the crisis and take the necessary precautions to reduce the risk of frozen water lines in the future.

Please take some time this fall to inspect your home and the area around your home to ensure everything is in proper order before the temperatures plunges. A little bit of work now could help reduce the risk of having your property affected by frozen water services this winter.

For further information or clarification please call the Village of South River during regular business hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.) at 705-386-2573.