

WEATHERING THE STORM: CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHURCHES

With southern states experiencing winter conditions like never before, churches may find themselves in unfamiliar situations. There are steps you can take today that can protect your church now and in the future.

- As safely as you can, keep your [building and equipment warm](#). Heating systems are a lifeline during cold conditions; if they fail, major damage and property losses could occur.
- Unplug or disconnect all electronic equipment. Anticipate that voltage surges will occur. The best protection is equipment isolation. If critical equipment must remain energized, make sure it is protected by surge protection devices.
- Voltage surge protection is necessary at all times - especially during cold, freezing conditions. Severe weather can cause power loss. When electricity is restored, the sudden surge of power can damage critical electronic equipment.
- Inspect all outside air dampers for proper operation.
- Clear and protect all outside vents from ice and snow accumulation.
- If using a [backup generator](#) or other portable heating unit, consult the operating manual for specific startup and shut down details. Have a plan for monitoring, maintaining, and refueling the generator while in use.
- [Portable generators](#) should NEVER be used indoors; they produce the poisonous gas carbon monoxide (CO). Portable generators should be located outside at least 20 feet from any window, door, or vent.
- [Carbon monoxide \(CO\)](#) is an odorless, colorless gas that kills without warning, and claims the lives of hundreds of people every year, and makes thousands more ill.
- Protect yourself from [carbon monoxide \(CO\) poisoning](#) by installing a battery-operated CO detector.
- Never use generators, gas or charcoal grills, camp stoves, or similar devices inside a building. The fumes are deadly.
- Plug in appliances to a generator using individual heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords.
- Do not use the generator or appliances if they are wet.
- Do not store gasoline indoors; the fumes could ignite.
- Check that electric pipe tracing systems are working properly. Have a contingency plan to heat tracing lines.
- Re-energize equipment one unit at a time after normal power is restored.
- Insulate pipes where needed for freeze protection. You can do this even now during the cold weather because it is done from the inside.
- Open cabinet doors to help warm air reach pipes under sinks to keep them warm.
- Use towels/rags/blankets to warm the pipes. Do not attempt to thaw a frozen pipe with a torch.
- If a pipe freezes, open the faucets to relieve pressure. Doing so will reduce the chance of a [pipe bursting](#). Increase the temperature in the room.
- If a pipe bursts, immediately [turn off the water](#) at the main shut-off valve and contact a licensed plumber.
- If you have turned off water to the building, sprinkler systems will not function in the event of a fire. Purchase fire extinguishers and monitor the building regularly until pipes are repaired (if needed) and water is restored.
- Once the temperature starts to rise, pipes that are currently frozen will begin to leak as the water within changes from a solid to a liquid again. Make sure pipes are checked often and [shut off](#) the main water valve if necessary.
- Perform a visual inspection of the buildings. Verify that all windows, doors, and dampers are closed.
- Schedule regular building checks. Arrange for snow and ice removal where necessary.
- Collect and distribute a list of emergency phone numbers and contacts for snow removal, heating system repair companies, utility issues, and the weather updates.
- Anticipate the [potential for flooding](#). Severe cold weather can cause flooding. Move vulnerable equipment or stock away from areas prone to water damage.
- If your church has heat and chooses to act as a warming shelter for those impacted by power outages or for those who do not utilize homeless shelters, consider the following:
 - Follow [CDC interim guidance](#) for disaster shelters during the COVID-19 pandemic, which recommends against large congregate shelters. Due to the pandemic, large congregate shelters should only be used as a last resort.
 - During disasters, resource availability may limit the ability to apply CDC and local guidance. Best efforts should be made to implement guidelines to the extent possible.
- For a full list of resources and materials regarding COVID-19 considerations, [visit Insurance Board.org](#).