



5 Ways to Winterize and Holiday-Proof Your Commercial Property

For many small businesses, the holiday/winter weather season is when they will earn a significant part of their revenue for the entire year. For others, it is a time when they will close for a short break or long winter hiatus. Regardless of your business model, preparing for the holidays and winter season can help prevent problems caused by indoor hazards or winter weather.



1. DECORATE SAFELY

- ✓ Choose decorations wisely. Some may be combustible and should be kept away from any heat or ignition sources.
- ✓ Use battery-operated candles in place of traditional ones.
- ✓ Never hang decorations from fire sprinklers or block them—this can prevent sprinklers from operating properly.
- ✓ Do not cover emergency exit signs, fire extinguishers or fire alarms with decorations; also avoid overcrowding aisles or cluttering any place that would make it difficult to exit in an emergency.
- ✓ Do not place extension cords in high-traffic areas of your workplace, or under rugs, carpets or furniture.
- ✓ Promote safe ladder use. This can help protect both employees and customers.
- ✓ Turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving the building.



Use battery-operated candles instead of traditional candles to avoid the risk of fire.

2. PREPARE FOR CLOSING

SECURITY

- ✓ Inform customers in advance if you'll be closing for the holidays or a longer seasonal break.
- ✓ Update your company website to reflect closing details.
- ✓ Shut down any unnecessary office equipment.
- ✓ Secure your building and set alarms. Advise your security company that you will be vacating the property. Verify/update emergency contact information they have on file.
- ✓ Consider hiring a patrol service to conduct recorded rounds while inspecting the premises at different times of day and night to reduce the threat of vandalism and theft.



Whether you need to notify your security company before vacating the property or you need to hire a patrol service, security can play a critical role when protecting your business this winter.

3. PROTECT AGAINST FREEZING

- ✓ Thermostats should be maintained at a minimum of 55°F when the building is unoccupied.
- ✓ For early detection of a broken pipe or valve, consider installing a monitored electric leak detection system for the main domestic water line. Monitored electronic sensors can also be installed near water sources for early leak detection.
- ✓ Run a small trickle of water to keep pipes from freezing.
- ✓ Open cabinet and utility room doors to expose pipes to warmer room temperatures to help keep them from freezing.
- ✓ Ensure all pipes located in vulnerable areas, such as crawlspaces, exterior walls, attics and unheated basements, are insulated with sleeves or wrapping. The more insulation you have, the better. Hardware and big box stores usually carry foam or fiberglass insulation.
- ✓ UL-approved gas or electric unit heaters can be installed in unheated sprinkler control valve/fire pump rooms.

- ✓ Indoor and outdoor fire protection sprinkler systems should be monitored by a constantly attended central station to provide early detection of a sprinkler pipe rupture due to freezing. At minimum, if your business is not located close to where you live or are spending the winter, have someone check the property to ensure the heat is working and the pipes have not frozen.



U.S. Air Force/Senior Airman Zachary Cacia

Don't set your thermostat below 55°F while your business is closed.

4. READY THE ROOF

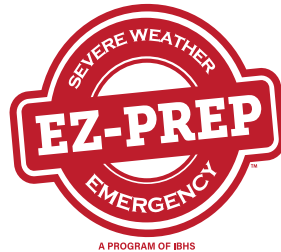
- ✓ If the building will be unoccupied for a prolonged period, safely clear the roof of all debris, dirt and leaves, which can block gutters and downspouts. Debris buildup can prevent snow melt from properly draining away from the building and can cause ice dams and heavy snow buildup on your roof.
- ✓ Inspect gutters/downspouts for securement. Heavy snow/ice can cause gutters to weaken and sag, leading them to break away from the building and allow for water intrusion.
- ✓ If a winter storm occurs during a holiday or seasonal break, arrange for snow removal for employee access and plan to have a professional remove any excess snow from the roof. This will prevent excessive loads on the roof which could cause structural failure.



Don't let debris, dirt and leaves collect in gutters and downspouts; this can lead to damaging ice dams and heavy snow buildup.

5. PLAN FOR WINTER AND BEYOND

- ✓ Create a winter weather plan with EZ-PREP™, IBHS' severe weather emergency preparedness and response planning toolkit. Simply record the above tasks and other action items specific to your business in this customizable, chronologically organized checklist. Download at www.DisasterSafety.org/ibhs-business-protection/ez-prep-emergency-response-planning.



- ✓ In addition to making winter weather repairs and preparations for your property, you should also develop a business continuity plan with OFB-EZ®, IBHS' free business continuity planning toolkit that can help your business continue to deliver its critical products and/or services at an acceptable level, even if there is damage to your facility, inventory, or customary operations. Download at www.DisasterSafety.org/open-for-business.



CONCLUSION

The winter holidays should be a time for businesses to reflect on past challenges and accomplishments, and make plans to prosper in the New Year. But at the same time, it is important to take steps to prevent injury or damage that can be caused by risks that are unique to this season. Doing so now can provide a head start on New Year's resolutions to strengthen your business in 2018.

IBHS is a nonprofit applied research and communications organization dedicated to reducing property losses due to natural and man-made disasters by building stronger, more resilient communities.

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