Spokane Winter Plumbing Checklist

For Spokane & Spokane Valley homes · Keep it on the fridge

Before the First Hard Freeze

- ☐ Find the **main water shutoff valve** and note what each shutoff in the home controls.
- ☐ **Test the main valve:** close it, confirm the water stops, then reopen it. A valve that sticks or leaks should be replaced.
- ☐ **Insulate pipes** in unheated areas and along exterior walls (crawl space, garage, attic). Heat tape or heating cable adds protection.
- ☐ **Disconnect and drain garden hoses**, and drain underground irrigation lines.
- ☐ **Close and seal crawl-space vents**, and keep garage doors closed where plumbing runs.
- ☐ Locate the **gas meter valve** and keep a large wrench nearby, for a major emergency only.

During a Cold Snap

- ☐ Keep the heat **above 55°F**, day and night, even when away from home.
- ☐ **Open sink cabinet doors** on exterior walls so warm air reaches the pipes.
- ☐ Let a **cold-water faucet drip** on exposed pipes; moving water is less likely to freeze.
- ☐ Traveling? Ask a neighbor to **check on the house**.

If a Pipe Freezes

1. A faucet that only trickles, or won't run, on a cold morning often means a frozen pipe.
2. **Shut off the water**, or confirm the shutoff works, before thawing. A split pipe starts leaking as the ice melts.
3. **Thaw slowly with low heat:** a hair dryer or a heating pad on low. **Never use an open flame.**
4. Can't find or reach the frozen section, or it's inside a wall? **Call a plumber.**

If a Pipe Bursts

1. **Close the main shutoff valve** right away.
2. **Stay clear of electricity:** never touch wet electrical equipment or stand in water to reach it.
3. **Drain the lines:** open a cold faucet on the lowest floor. Turn off power to an electric water heater.
4. Move belongings out of the wet area and catch drips with buckets.
5. **Photograph or video the damage** before cleanup, for insurance.
6. **Dry everything within 24–48 hours** to help prevent mold.
7. **Call a plumber** and confirm the contractor's registration with WA L&I.

Important Spokane Numbers

Life-threatening emergency	**911**
Smell gas (rotten-egg odor)? Leave first, then call Avista from outside or a neighbor's phone	**1-800-227-9187**
City of Spokane Water Department	**509-625-7800**
City of Spokane general line	**311 or 509-755-2489**
Outside Spokane city limits	**Water provider's number is on the water bill**
Call before digging	**811**
SNAP home repair programs (income-qualified owners)	**509-456-7627**
Verify a contractor (WA L&I)	**lni.wa.gov/verify**

Fill In for This Home

Main water shutoff is located: _____

Gas meter valve is located: _____

Water provider & phone: _____

Home insurance contact: _____

Need a plumber? **Spokane Home Help**, a plumbing referral service: **spokanehomehelp.com**

Spokane Home Help is a referral service, not a plumbing contractor. General information only; follow the guidance of local utilities and officials.

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Know Your Home: Plumbing Basics

Shutoff valves, sewer lines, gas safety and local help

Know the Main Shutoff Valve

- Usually where the water line enters the house: basement, crawl space, garage or utility room.
- **Round wheel handle (gate valve):** turn clockwise until it stops, which takes several turns.
- **Lever handle (ball valve):** a quarter turn, so the lever sits across the pipe.
- The valve at the meter or curb box is usually for utility crews. Check with the water provider before using it.

Sewer Line: Who Is Responsible?

- **City of Spokane:** the property owner maintains and repairs the entire side sewer, from the house to the public main, including the section under the street.
- **Spokane County:** the line from the home to the street main is privately owned; the County maintains only the public main.
- Tree roots that grow into the side sewer are the homeowner's responsibility.
- **Before anyone clears a blocked sewer line, call Avista:** gas lines can cross sewer pipes.

Smell Gas?

- **Leave the house right away** and move upwind.
- Don't use light switches, phones or anything that could make a spark inside.
- From a safe place, call **911** and **Avista at 1-800-227-9187**.
- Never turn the gas back on yourself.

Home Repair Help in Spokane

Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners (SNAP) runs home repair programs for owner-occupied homes that meet income guidelines, for health and safety hazards such as no water and plumbing problems. Call **509-456-7627** or visit **snapwa.org**.

Before Hiring a Plumber

- ☐ Check the contractor's registration, bond and trade licenses at **lni.wa.gov/verify**.
- ☐ Ask for a **written, itemized estimate** before work begins.
- ☐ Ask whether a permit is needed, and who pulls it.

Two Quick Leak Tests

Water meter test (2 hours): read the water meter, use no water for two hours, then read it again. If the reading changed, there may be a leak somewhere in the home.

Toilet dye test (10 minutes): put a few drops of food coloring in the toilet tank and wait 10 minutes without flushing. Color in the bowl means the tank is leaking.

Sources: City of Spokane Water Department, Frozen Pipes; City of Spokane, Side Sewer Installation Handbook; Spokane County, Homeowner Responsibility (sewer); American Red Cross, Frozen Pipes and Flood Safety; U.S. EPA, A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture and Your Home; U.S. EPA WaterSense, Fix a Leak; Avista, Natural Gas & Electric Safety Guide; SNAP, Home Repair; WA Dept. of Labor & Industries, Verify a Contractor; This Old House; The Home Depot. Checked November 2026.

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