

A combination of cold weather and lack of snow is one reason home septic systems can freeze.

Other reasons include irregular use, leaking plumbing fixtures or a pipe that's not installed with the proper change of elevation. If the soil over a pipe is compacted, the elevation of the pipe may shift, causing a loss of gravity flow. This results in water left standing in pipes, and the water can easily freeze.

Here are some ways to reduce chances of a frozen septic system:

- Provide insulation by adding an 8-12-inch layer of mulch, leaves or loose hay or straw over the pipes, tank and soil treatment area.
- Make sure all risers, inspection pipes and manholes have properly fitting caps with no cracks.
- Keep all types of heavy traffic off the system. This includes family activities, snowmobiles and ATV vehicles. This is especially important in winter, but is also a good rule to follow all year. Compacted snow can lead to freezing in the soil treatment area.
- Use normal amounts of water - the warmer, the better.
- Plan ahead if you're going to be gone for an extended period. This could include pumping the tank before leaving, or in the case of a lake cabin, not returning until warmer weather.
- Fix any leaky plumbing.
- High-efficiency furnaces produce a small drip of water. This trickle of water can freeze in the pipes, since there is no velocity to push the water into the tank. It is best to re-route this into a sump pump or directly outdoors.
- Since most systems depend on gravity flow, have the pipes televised by a septic professional if you suspect improper slopes to the pipes.