

THE NEWS HUB

Insider tips for your car and home



Emergencies homeowners should know how to handle

When you own a home, chances are that something will go wrong. However, with a little preparation, you can be ready. Here are 8 common problems that may arise and some solutions:

#1: Frozen pipes

When the temperature drops below 0 C, pipes can freeze overnight. They're usually located in exterior walls, attics, and crawl spaces. Know where the home's main shut-off valve is located. Once the valve is closed, open a cold water tap in the basement to drain the remaining water. Warm the frozen pipe with an electric heating pad, hair dryer, space heater, or warm towel. Once thawed, turn the water back on slowly and check for cracks and leaks. Important: Do not use kerosene or propane heaters, charcoal stoves, or any open flame to thaw a frozen pipe. This is a fire hazard.

#2: Animal invasion

If wildlife gets inside, it can cause a lot of damage. Open a window, close the doors, and they may leave as long as they're not in the walls. If you don't know what type of animal it is, use a thin coat of flour at the entry point to identify paw prints or droppings. If the animal appears to have moved in permanently or poses a danger, call your local animal control for humane removal.

#3: Blackout

Disconnect all appliances and electronics or connect them to a surge-protecting power bar. If you must use candles, practice proper fire safety and don't leave them unattended. Don't open your freezer or fridge unless necessary. If the outage is widespread, do not approach damaged or downed electrical lines outside and contact your electrical company. Important: Never use charcoal or gas barbecues in the house to generate heat. They give off carbon monoxide - an odourless, colourless gas that can be life-threatening.

#4: Gas leak

If you detect a gas odour or your carbon monoxide detector goes off, evacuate the house immediately. Call 911. Do not assume it is safe to re-enter the home when the alarm stops. Opening windows and doors diminishes the carbon monoxide in the air, but the source may still be producing gas. Have emergency responders determine if it's safe for you to return.

#5: Basement flood

Don't enter a flooded basement before turning off the circuit breaker. If you can't reach it, call your utility and ask them to do so. Once it's safe, wear rubber boots and thick gloves. Water from sewage backups, for example, contains toxic elements. Professional Canadian contractor Mike Holmes recommends identifying the source and blocking, stopping, or turning it off. Call professionals and, if necessary, advise your insurance broker. Keep a log of events and photograph the damage.

#6: Furnace malfunction

Not all furnace issues require a repair person. If your furnace doesn't appear to be working, Reliance Home Comfort recommends checking first if your furnace is turned on (tripped circuit breaker), whether the filters are dirty, the thermostat is working, and inspect your air ducts.

#7: Kitchen fire

Never leave cooking unattended. But, if a fire should start, don't panic. Keep a box of baking soda nearby to douse flare-ups in a stove-top pan or toaster. Don't toss water on the blaze or try to smother it with a dishtowel. If possible, use a pot lid to extinguish flames. If it's an oven fire, don't open the door. Educate yourself if you plan to use a fire extinguisher. Improperly used, they can spread fires.

#8: Flush fail

A plunger is the first fix. If it has a rubber flange, make sure it's extended for the best seal. Angle it to cover the opening and start plunging slowly and then more vigorously. If that doesn't work, you'll need a plumber's snake or a plumber. If problems persist, open the tank to see if the handle has become disconnected or if part of the flushing mechanism needs to be replaced.

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