

MU expert recommends slow thaw for frozen pipes

COLUMBIA, Mo. - After days without electricity, people will be anxious to get their lives back to normal.

A University of Missouri expert warns homeowners to proceed cautiously when thawing out frozen pipes.

"The object is to thaw the pipe at the same rate that it froze, so it doesn't damage the pipes," said Ronn Phillips, an associate professor in architectural studies.

"Nothing damages a pipe faster than dislodging the joints on a soldered connection," he said. "The joints are the weakest point."

Phillips said the first step in thawing pipes is to relieve the pressure by turning on the faucet.

Then, apply heat to the frozen section of the pipe. "Something as simple as a light bulb will work," he said, adding that the heat source should thaw the pipe slowly.

"We don't recommend using a flame," Phillips said, which can pose a fire risk. Blow torches, or kerosene and propane heaters will heat up too quickly and cause the pipe to break.

Phillips urged homeowners to be especially careful with plastic pipes, which have a lower melting point than copper pipes. He added that plastic pipe will become brittle and rigid when exposed to cold temperatures.

"Plastic is renowned for busting before copper," he said.