

# Preparing for winter



With COVID-19 cases rising again across the country, more lockdowns look increasingly likely. Our contractors are already stretched as they work their way through the repairs backlog from the first lockdown. So we hope these tips on making your home fit for the cold winter months will help you avoid the risk and inconvenience of having to make an emergency call-out



Contractors Ryan and Paul, pictured, are working their way through the repairs backlog that built up during the first lockdown so we can get back to providing a normal repairs service

## Order any repairs needed now



This leaflet gives advice on things you should check in your home now to avoid the sort of repair problems that typically come up each winter.

You may find faults that obviously need repairing now. Or you may spot signs of a problem that, left unchecked, could get much worse.

### Preventive measures

Please let us know about them now, no matter how trivial the matter seems. Getting a problem repaired before it gets worse, the weather gets much colder or we find we're back in lockdown, will help you avoid the need for an emergency call-out later on when the risks to your health could be much higher.

You may find there is a delay before we are able to get non-urgent work done because the backlog of repairs has to be our priority. We will do our best to sort it out promptly and thank you in advance for your patience.

**To report your repair please phone us on ☎ 020 7704 2324 or log it using My Account.**

### Emergencies out of hours

Outside office hours please call our out of hours service if you need an emergency repair.

**Monday-Thursday**, from 5:30pm to 9:30am ☎ **0772 530 2389**

**Weekends**, from 5:30pm on Friday to 9:30am on Monday ☎ **0300 131 7300**



## Emergency calls

### Power cut

If all the homes around you have **no power** call the **UK Power Network** on ☎ **105**.

### Gas emergency

If you suspect a **gas or carbon monoxide leak** turn off the gas supply and call the **National Grid** at once. ☎ **0800 111 999**.

### Burst or frozen pipes

See page 2 for what to do.



### Stock up on

- \* batteries and light bulbs
- \* keep at least one (working) torch in a place where you can find it in the dark.

### Know what's where

- \* your gas supply pipe
- \* your water stopcock
- \* your consumer unit.

### Spare front door key

Leave a copy of your front door key with someone you can trust. See page 3.



- \* **Contacting us in normal office hours ☎ 020 7704 2324 ✉ info@barnsbury.org**
- \* **Please let us know if you would like this information in larger print.**

### Radiator stays tepid

If a radiator isn't heating up it may have an air bubble. Repairing it is easy with a 'bleed key'. Try this: [www.localheroes.com/advice/how-to-bleed-radiator](http://www.localheroes.com/advice/how-to-bleed-radiator)

## Check your heating is working

Now is the time to check that your heating is in good working order. If you find that it is faulty it makes more sense to get it repaired now than to suffer a cold home while you wait for a repair in winter.

To check your heating:

- \* turn your system on, then
- \* turn the thermostat up to 30 degrees and leave it at that setting for half hour (only)
- \* check all your radiators have warmed up and that none leak.

### Is it CO poisoning?

The main symptom is:

- \* tension-type headache

Others can include:

- \* dizziness
- \* feeling/being sick
- \* tired and confused
- \* stomach pain
- \* being short of or struggling to breathe.

## Test your carbon monoxide detector

Regularly check the battery in your CO detector by pressing the in-built test button. If you hear your CO detector go off, **do the following at once**, no matter what time it is:

- \* turn off any household appliance that could be a source of carbon monoxide
- \* open doors and windows to let fresh air into your home

- \* check that everyone in your home is awake then go outside - that means all of you
- \* report it to the **National Grid** on ☎ **0800 111**. They will send an engineer out to check that your home is safe, or not
- \* If anyone who was in your home is showing symptoms of CO poisoning call a GP or medical professional.

### Insulating water pipes

Lagging protects water pipes. Lagging is cheap and very easy to fit to the 15mm pipes. It also keeps water pipes warm for longer, which cuts your heating bills. Contact **Green Doctors** for advice on insulating your home and getting grants or discounts to make staying warm at home a lot cheaper. See page 4 for details.



## Protect your water pipes

Bare pipes in lofts, cellars, outer walls and for outside taps can freeze if it gets very cold.

Water swells when it freezes so it may burst the pipe. When the ice thaws, any water gushing out from the broken pipe is likely to cause a flood.

If your water pipes freeze or (worse) a pipe bursts:

- \* turn off the water supply to your home at the stopcock
- \* turn 'on' all the taps
- \* switch off the power (red switch) in your consumer unit (also called a fusebox)

- \* switch off your boiler
- \* call us at once:  
during office hours ☎ **020 7704 2324**  
outside office hours  
Mon - Thurs ☎ **0772 530 2389**  
Fri - Mon ☎ **0300 1317300**

**The stopcock looks like a tap and is on the pipe that brings water into your home. If you turn it right off it will stop your water supply. Make sure you know now where it is so you can turn it off in an emergency.**

### Covid-19 safety

Steve will wear a mask, gloves and shoe coverings and will use hand sanitiser.

Please make sure he is able to get into your home at the agreed time.

Please also keep a safe distance from Steve while he is in your home. Stay outside or in another room.

## Get your gas appliances checked

Getting your annual gas safety checks done has been much harder with lockdown, and with many of you shielding, but the checks are vital for your safety.

If we have not yet checked your gas appliances this year please let us know so we can make an appointment to do this.

If you have any concerns tell us so we can agree a way to do the work that makes you feel safe.

For example, we could wait for a sunny day so you can sit outside until the work is finished.

### Why do we do the checks?

We have to by law, but the law was made because faulty gas appliances can:

- \* explode, or
- \* leak carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas that has no smell or colour.

\* Contacting us in normal office hours ☎ **020 7704 2324** ✉ [info@barnsbury.org](mailto:info@barnsbury.org)

## Keep toilets and drains clear

Fears earlier this year of a toilet paper shortage led to panic buying. Faced with empty supermarket shelves, some of you had to find a substitute and the result was a huge jump in blocked toilets and drains.

**Toilet paper and bodily waste are the only things you should flush down the loo.**

Even paper towels swell up too much because they are designed to absorb lots of liquid. They will cause a blockage if flushed.

If you use anything other than toilet paper to wipe, blot or stem a flow, even if it is labelled 'biodegradable', wrap it and bin it. Make sure everyone else in your home does the same.

### Don't flush these!

All of these items will swell in water and some may also contain plastic. They will and do block drains and toilets:

- \* paper towels
- \* tissues
- \* handwipes
- \* sanitary towels/tampons
- \* nappies - of any sort.

## What to do if the power goes out

If your power goes off (and the meter hasn't run out) you may have had a power cut. But don't rush to report it until you have checked with neighbours to see if their power is out too.

**If all the homes around you have also lost their power call the UK Power Network on ☎105 (mobile) or ☎0800 31 63 105 (from a landline). Calls are free.**



▲ A typical consumer unit will look something like this. Red is the main switch. Grey switches are known as the trip switch.

If only the power in your house has gone off check all your electric sockets and turn off all your electric appliances.

Then go to the consumer unit (which some of you might still know as the fusebox). The consumer unit will be close to your electricity meter. All the switches should be pointing upwards.

If any switch is pointing down, flip it up. If you find you still have no power call:

- \* us in normal working hours on ☎ 020 7704 2324
- \* the emergency service outside office hours on Mon - Thurs ☎ 0772 530 2389 Fri - Mon ☎ 0300 131 7300.



### Be a priority for getting help in an emergency

If you are vulnerable because of age or ill health, for example, registering with the Priority Services Register (PSR) will bring help from the emergency service you've called very quickly in a power cut. Registering is free and confidential.

To get your name and details added to the Priority Services Register call ☎ 0800 169 9970.

## How to avoid getting locked out

We do not hold a copy of keys to the door (or doors) of any of your homes so cannot help if you get locked out.

If you get locked out and cannot get hold of a spare key you will have to call a locksmith to come out to fit a new lock. You will have to pay the locksmith yourself.

A better and cheaper solution is to leave a spare key with someone you trust, ideally family, a friend or a good neighbour.

Pick someone who lives fairly close and who is likely to be at home when and if you need to get hold of your key, especially if that may be late at night.

### Is this your key?



Put a distinctive fob or label on your key so it is easy to see it's your key. Do not put your address on the key. You don't want the 'wrong person' to get hold of it.

\* Contacting us in normal office hours ☎ 020 7704 2324 ✉ info@barnsbury.org

## Look out for neighbours

One of the few lovely things about lockdown was the huge number of you who went out of your way to look out for your neighbours. Even small acts of kindness made a big difference.

If you know or suspect a neighbour is going through a hard time, ask if they need help. If you're not comfortable doing this you could always ask us.

If we all do a little bit to support other people living near us, we may in some small way leave

fewer people feeling lonely, isolated and so more at risk of mental or physical illness.

Thank you to the vast majority of you who are respectful and considerate to your neighbours.

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Keeping your household's noise levels down and thinking how your activities may affect other people is more important than ever when we are all spending more time in our homes, out of choice or necessity.

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### Isolated or lonely?

**We Are Islington**, run by the council and local charities, may be able to help or will direct you to an agency it thinks suitable. If you are 50 or older, **Age UK** may offer you support.

We Are Islington  
☎ 020 7527 8222  
Age UK Islington  
☎ 020 7281 6018  
www.islingtonmind.org.uk  
☎ 020 3301 9850

## Where to get help if money is a struggle

Paying your rent keeps the roof over your head and means we can afford to keep your home in good order and provide support where it's needed. Do let us know if you are struggling with costs because of the pandemic. We may be able to help.

### Advice from Green Doctors

Our free **Green Doctors** service can cut your fuel bills while still keeping you warm. Call for an appointment on ☎ 0300 365 5003 or email ✉ greendoctorsLDN@groundwork.org.uk

### New hardship fund

Our new **hardship fund** may help if your income has been badly affected by the pandemic. Call housing manager Felicity to find out what sort of help we can offer through the fund.

### Welfare benefits

We can help if you need to apply for **welfare benefits**, can explain which ones you may be entitled to and we can help with a claim for universal credit, pension credit and other benefits.

### Paying your rent

If you normally come to our office to pay your rent you should now be paying it via our website or by standing order. Setting up a standing order is easy and saves queuing at the bank. Call housing manager Felicity if you need help to set this up.



## How to top up your pay as you go meter

### On a PAYG gas meter

1. Put your gas card in the meter. You'll then get an option to use **emergency credit**.
2. To accept it press the **red button 'A'**. This activates the emergency credit.
3. You'll need to top up to get back to normal use. **Press the red button 'A' once to see how much you owe**. This will be the total for emergency credit used, paying back any debts still owed and standing charges. If you don't buy enough credit when you top-up, your meter will still leave you with at least 30% of your top-up to use for gas.

### On a PAYG electricity meter

1. Put your key into the electricity meter. If it is already in, take it out and put it back in. **This will activate the emergency credit**.
2. To get back to normal use, you'll have to pay back the emergency credit and anything else you owe. **To find out the smallest amount you'll need to top up, press the 'display' button on your meter once**. This will pay for the emergency credit you've used, any debt repayments and standing charges.

### Going away for a spell?

Check the credit on your meters before you leave because the fridge, freezer (if separate) and boiler will all need to be left on. The meters will go on taking the daily standing charge and any debt repayments while you're away. If you run out of credit and nobody is there to sort it out your electricity and/or gas will be cut off. So make sure you've got enough credit on both meters to last until you get back.

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If the cost of topping up your meters is a constant struggle for you, do let us know. We may be able to find a way to help.

\* **Contacting us in normal office hours** ☎ 020 7704 2324 ✉ info@barnsbury.org