

How to Unfreeze RV Pipes and Tanks

Frozen pipes and tanks are a cold weather camper's nightmare, which is why taking preventative steps is so important when camping in cold weather. Many of these thawing techniques are also preventative measures, and the tools used to prepare for cold weather should be staple items in your RV if you will be camping through the winter, and even if you will be camping in the fall or very early spring. We will show you the parts of the RV water system that could freeze, tools you might want on hand to thaw frozen tanks and pipes, and some of the techniques when using those tools to avoid damage during the thawing process. For more detailed information on unfreezing RV pipes and tanks, refer to our full Web guide on [How to Unfreeze RV Pipes and Tanks](#).

Components Most Likely to Freeze

- Water pump
- Fresh water lines
- Fresh water hook-up garden hose
- All holding tanks

Tools to Unfreeze RV Pipes and Tanks

- Heat gun
- Hair dryer
- Heating cable
- Heating tape
- Heating blanket
- Propane heater
- RV skirting
- RV antifreeze

Unfreezing a Water Pump

This is the pump that pushes fresh water through the lines to the sinks, shower, and toilet. Ice formation inside the pump can fracture the insides as the freezing water expands, so be sure that if you suspect the pump has frozen to work on thawing this first and confirm whether or not it has been severely damaged.

The water pump is usually located within 2-3 feet of your freshwater tank, so if the fresh water tank exists outside of the living space, it's possible the water pump may as well.

If the pump is frozen but there is no damage, use a heating gun or propane heater to thaw it out (depending on location of the water pump); practice safe thawing techniques to avoid fire hazard or further damaging water pump components. You may determine there is damage after thawing is complete because the pump may not function as normal.

Unfreezing Water Lines

Sometimes water lines feeding the different RV water systems exist outside of the interior living space of the camper, in which case, they are much more susceptible to freezing. There are several ways you could unfreeze exterior water lines:

- **Heating tape/heating cable** – these are heated lengths of flat or corded material that plug into a power source and heat up; you can wrap them around frozen pipes to begin thawing. They are also fantastic preventive tools.
- **Heating gun/hair dryer** – using one of these tools is an efficient way to thaw pipes, but you need to be really careful about heat distribution, especially with the heat gun. Heating guns can get as hot as a thousand degrees, so run the heat back and forth slowly in front of the pipe to evenly spread heat out and not damage a specific area of pipe.
- **Propane heater** – you can place a propane heater under the RV to thaw pipes (works best when there is also RV skirting), but it can be a huge fire hazard, so be sure to monitor the heater at all times and do not leave the area or sleep in the RV while the heater is still running beneath it.



Unfreezing a Freshwater Hose

When you are on fresh water hook-ups, the garden hose that delivers the fresh water to your RV will be sitting outside in the cold and the water in it can easily freeze in the hose. This can cause major problems when you're trying to get water to move; because it's outside in the elements, it can easily freeze and block the line from moving water through your RV.

If your hose is already frozen, the best solution is to use heating tape or heating cables to thaw the line. Once you've thawed it, you may consider either leaving the heating elements on the hose until you pack up or filling your fresh water tank (which is typically inside the living space), and then disconnecting the fresh water hook-up hose until you need to fill your fresh water tank again. You can also consider investing in a [heated freshwater hook-up hose](#) to avoid this problem altogether.

Note: For more detailed information on unfreezing RV pipes and tanks, refer to our full Web guide on [How to Unfreeze RV Pipes and Tanks](#).

Note

Freeze prevention is always the best approach when you know you will be camping in sub-freezing temperatures, so come prepared to fend off Jack Frost before your pipes and tanks freeze and create a problem on your chilly camping trip. For more details on freeze prevention, refer to our guide on [How to Keep Your RV Holding Tanks from Freezing](#).

Unfreezing RV Holding Tanks

Often, wastewater tanks are located on the underside of the RV, meaning they are exposed to the elements. Without some kind of heating element, the tank contents can quickly freeze. There are several ways you could unfreeze holding tanks:

- **Heating blanket** – these act just like heating blankets for your bed, but at higher temperatures and are more weather resistant. They usually have adhesives that help them cling to the tank, and have sensors that will turn the heat on when it detects temperatures lower than 38 degrees or so. While they are primarily preventative in nature, they will help thaw frozen holding tanks.
- **RV skirting** – this is typically used to prevent freezing, but applying it after tanks and pipes have frozen can help trap the heat from your thawing methods under the RV and make the process go faster.
- **Propane heater** – you can place a propane heater under the RV to thaw tanks (works best when there is also RV skirting), but it can be a huge fire hazard, so be sure to monitor the heater at all times and do not leave it unattended or sleep in the RV while the heater is still running.
- **RV antifreeze** – this should not be treated as a primary thawing technique but used in conjunction with an unfreezing approach like heating cables, heating blanket, or propane heater. Once enough thawing has taken place, start pouring RV antifreeze into the wastewater tanks through the toilet and sink or shower drains to speed up the process and prevent further freezing.

