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### **Thawing Frozen Water Pipes Can Cause a Devastating Fire**

(ANCHORAGE, Alaska) – One inherent problem attributed to Alaska’s long cold winters is frozen water lines. Unfortunately the methods to thaw these frozen pipes can cause more damage than the frozen pipes themselves. Recent fire incidents in Cordova and the Mat-Su Valley prove the fire dangers involved in thawing frozen water pipes.

On March 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> the Cordova Volunteer Fire Department responded to two fire calls related to water line thawing. Unfortunately the structure fire on March 13<sup>th</sup> destroyed the home of a volunteer firefighter and took the life of one of his dogs. The fire was caused by a faulty heat tape. The other fire on March 14<sup>th</sup> was caused by too much amperage sent through the water pipe system from an arc welder trying to thaw frozen pipes. Two circuits that were grounded to the water pipes over heated and melted the wiring causing a smoldering fire in the attic.

On March 16<sup>th</sup> the Central Mat-Su Fire Department and West Lakes Fire Department responded to a mobile home fire that was caused by improper water line thawing techniques. Considerable damage to the mobile home occurred before crews could extinguish the fire. It was determined that a large arc welder had been improperly attached to the home’s water system in an attempt to thaw a frozen pipe.

The Alaska Division of Fire and Life Safety remind Alaskans to use extreme caution when thawing frozen water lines. The following safety tips could prevent a devastating home fire caused by improper thawing techniques:

- Do not use open flame near combustible materials to thaw pipes.
- Keep portable space heaters 3 ft. from combustible materials.
- Only use UL listed heat tape and follow manufacturer’s directions **completely.**
- Check heat tapes annually before winter use for damage or wear.
- Call certified, bonded thawing contractors to thaw frozen pipes.

Alaska State Fire Marshal David Tyler adds, “Fire safe behavior can keep a fire from starting. Working smoke alarms, planning and practicing your fire escape plan and adding residential fire suppression sprinklers can ensure your family’s safety from a fire.”

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