

# Winterizing your irrigation system

YOGITA SHARMA /  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**E**xpensive equipment needs care and irrigation systems are no exception to this rule. In areas where the frost level could extend below the depth of installed pipe, irrigation systems need to be drained to prevent freeze damage.

Enduring the stress of repeated water expansion weakens the pipe, whether it is made of polyethylene or PVC, and can lead to fractures along the pipe's length. The preventive procedure is easy but needs to be done on time.

Winterizing an irrigation system without a check valve can be done using manual or automatic drain valves. Systems with check valves need to use an air compressor to blow water out.

These are a few tips irrigation contractors around the country follow while blowing out a check-valve irrigation system.

- Jim Brinkerhoff, education manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, CA, suggests activating the zone furthest from the compressor, beginning with zones at higher elevations before opening the compressor valve to gradually introduce air into the system.

- The irrigation system should be evacuated in two short cycles rather than one long one according to Tracy Shields, outside sales, Horizon, Denver,

CO. He suggests blowing out each zone twice in short cycles of two to three minutes for better results.

- If the temperature has already dropped considerably, the sprinkler nozzles must be inspected to make sure they aren't frozen. If not, eliminate excess water where necessary.

- The pipe closest to the compressor should be checked to make sure it isn't too hot since excessive heat due to high air velocity can damage the system.

- The pump should be drained after the system has been allowed to bleed dry. Bob Giordano, irrigation department manager for Cagwin and Dorward Landscape Contractors, Novato, CA, advises shutting off the manual drain valves and insulating the ones above ground using a blanket.

- Any excess water that may have been trapped in the backflow devices must be removed by opening and closing the lever handle. Brinkerhoff suggests leaving the devices partially open for winter.

- All exposed areas of the pump system or the pipe must be insulated.

- The electrical system's controller must be left in the "power on" position to prevent condensation inside the enclosure that could lead to corrosion or component failure. The rain or station start switches must be in the "off" position before allowing your system to hibernate for winter. **LM**



Tracy Shields advises to evacuate an irrigation system in two short cycles rather than one long one.



Jim Brinkerhoff



Bob Giordano