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# 2000

## What Is Y2K?

Y2K is a short way of writing Year 2000. The Y2K problem comes from a shortcut used in computers beginning when computer memory was expensive. Computer programs used two digits to record the year. If not corrected, this could cause systems to shut down or generate incorrect data if they read "00" as 1900 instead of 2000. Many people have been working to make computers and microchips Y2K compliant, that is, able to recognize the full date.

## The Gift of the Y2K Bug

—Frank Leibrock, MBA

Sometimes gifts come in surprising packages. Looking at Y2K in a new light affords us an opportunity to begin creating the communities we want.



Our communities are one of the most powerful social constructs in which we are involved. They are the places where we spend the most time, come into contact with the most people, and contribute the most value to others. Our behaviors in our communities profoundly shape our identities.

The strongest likelihood of successfully dealing with the Y2K issue resides in our communities. If our social structures and infrastructures are well prepared, any problems Y2K may bring can be handled effectively. Developing contingency plans requires collaborative community leadership, which is both a frame of mind and a set of behaviors. It focuses the capabilities of many people on common goals.

Community leaders can bring together representatives from government, utility companies, police and fire departments, hospitals, pharmacies and other crucial businesses to discuss plans for Y2K and other concerns.

By planning collaboratively, maintaining essential linkages throughout our communities, sharing information and gathering feedback on an ongoing basis, we create a positive and resourceful atmosphere in which to deal with all community issues, not just those associated with Y2K.

The opportunity to bring forth community leadership and strengthen our communities by working together is a gift of the Y2K bug.

—Frank R. Leibrock, a Colorado State University Cooperative Extension specialist, provides small business support within the Department of Design and Merchandising.

## Preparing for Y2K

—Dell Rae Moellenberg

Some families are already preparing for next winter's events. Most experts agree that Y2K won't cause major problems, but it's still a good idea to be prepared for interruptions in daily life, whether it's for a severe snowstorm or for Y2K.

A food shortage due to Y2K is unlikely, according to the Gartner Group, a technology, research and analysis firm commissioned by President Clinton's Council on Year 2000 Conversion to assess food supply issues at the turn of the century. Representatives of major utility companies say it's doubtful that utilities will fail in most areas. If utilities do fail, it probably won't be for more than a few hours, so special preparation for long-term food supplies and heating devices are unlikely to be necessary.

However, some families may want to prepare. Here are steps to help them do so safely:

### How to help your family and community prepare

- Become a community Y2K facilitator.
- Connect with responsible and reliable sources of information and assistance.
- Address specific needs of the elderly and others with special needs. Con artists often target elderly and vulnerable people for scams.
- Your children can be good neighbors by checking on the elderly in your area and running errands for them. Judy McKenna, consumer sciences specialist\*, suggests meeting with your

neighbors to develop a block or neighborhood plan.

- Tap into your child's ability with technology by engaging his or her help in making your personal computer and other computer-dependent systems in your home Y2K compatible.
- Bill Nobles, Archuleta County agent\*, suggests that parents encourage their children to be the eyes and ears of a neighborhood. As neighbors prepare for Y2K, children can help convey messages, watch for suspicious activity related to scams, and provide information to help alleviate problems.

### Helping your children understand Y2K

- Include your younger children in the steps you take to prepare for Y2K, says Pat Johnson, family development specialist\*, and speak frankly to them about Y2K. Children may be frightened by adult conversations they overhear. Young children don't understand the concept of a new year, or how computers work and affect our daily lives.
- Use a calm tone of voice when speaking with children, and avoid conveying fear in your expression, speech or body language. Children look to adults for guidance on how to feel and react.
- Encourage your children to ask family members, teachers, or community leaders about Y2K. This helps them understand it and feel more control.
- If you believe that your utilities may be threatened by Y2K, treat the event as a special camping excursion in your home. Set the scene with flashlights, games and sleeping

bags so that children don't feel frightened by your precautions, says Nobles.

### What kinds of systems will likely be affected by Y2K?

- Computer programs written for a specific task, says Ruth Willson, computer applications specialist\*.
- Computer programs dependent on a strict maintenance schedule.
- Security systems and programmable heating systems that may be date sensitive.

### Food and water storage and safety

(Information on preparing a three-day food supply was compiled by the Front Range offices.\*)

- Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, the American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency recommend that people wanting to maintain a reserve of food and water set aside enough for three days; setting aside more food is unnecessary, except in the most extreme cases.
- No matter your reasons for storing or preserving food — Y2K or a severe winter storm — it's important that the food you store remains safe to eat and is good for you.
- Melissa Bardsley, food science and nutrition specialist\*, suggests stocking non-perishable foods that don't need refrigeration, which your family eats on a regular basis. Choose easy-to-prepare canned or dried food.
- It is important to plan when setting aside food so you have enough without wasting any, says Bardsley.
- Once you've established a supply, rotate and use the food in it every six months to a year to keep the supply fresh.

\*Colorado State University Cooperative Extension

- Store the food in tightly-sealing containers, such as the original sealed boxes and cans, and store them off the ground in case of flooding. Keep the storage area clean to discourage pests such as ants and mice.
- Store water in sterilized, durable containers. Tap water already treated against harmful organisms can be stored directly from your faucet. Water will keep for up to 12 months.
- Avoid storing too many foods high in salt; they increase your thirst.
- Store food in small portions to avoid leftovers.
- Keep at least one manual can opener with your food supply.
- Store a minimum of one gallon of water per day per person for drinking, cooking and cleaning.
- For more information on storing a three-day food supply, contact your local Colorado State Cooperative Extension office.

### Protecting your personal finances

- According to the Federal Reserve, essentially all U.S. banks have fixed possible Y2K problems. The Federal Reserve supervises banking organizations and is the primary clearinghouse for electronic payments in America.
- However, experts such as McKenna recommend that the public take routine, reasonable precautions.
- Keep documents of your financial records on hand — checking and savings account, mortgage, mutual funds and investment statements.

- Ask your bank representative if the bank has met federal Y2K guidelines.
- Don't withdraw large amounts of money from accounts as a precaution against the Y2K bug. Doing so will increase your risk of robbery and fraud. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation insures your bank accounts up to \$100,000.
- Under no circumstances should you give out financial information, including account numbers, over the phone or via mail unless you initiate the exchange. Your financial institution already has your account numbers, so they have no need to request them.
- Don't rely on a phone number given by a caller to verify his credibility; many scams are sophisticated and elaborate enough to include phone operators fraudulently representing financial institutions.
- Critically evaluate special Y2K products before purchasing them. Unscrupulous con artists are taking advantage of an opportunity to make money because of rumors and false information.

—Dell Rae Moellenberg is a Colorado State University Cooperative Extension media relations specialist.

For more information on Y2K, see: Colorado State University Cooperative Extension web sites at <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt> and <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/SITE/y2k3day.html>

Local Colorado State University Cooperative Extension offices, usually listed under the county government section of your local phone book

Local city officials for local government sites

Colorado State Government: <http://www.state.co.us/Year2000/> or call 303-620-4281

Federal Government: <http://www.y2k.gov/> or call toll-free 1-888-USA-4Y2K (1-888-872-4925)

Department of Agriculture: <http://www.usda.gov/news/y2000.htm>

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) emergency preparedness: <http://www.fema.gov/y2k/>

Especially for kids: <http://www.fema.gov/kids/y2k.htm>

Utne Reader, including the 174 page *Y2K Citizens Action Guide*: <http://www.utne.com/y2k/>

### American Red Cross Y2K Checklist

\_\_\_ Check with manufacturers of any essential computer-controlled electronic equipment in your home to see if that equipment may be affected.

\_\_\_ Stock disaster supplies to last several days to a week for yourself and those who live with you.

\_\_\_ As you would in preparation for a storm of any kind, have a small amount of extra cash on hand in a safe place.

\_\_\_ Similar to preparing for a winter storm, keep your automobile gas tank above half full.

\_\_\_ In case the power fails, plan to use alternative cooking devices in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Don't use open flames or charcoal grills indoors.

\_\_\_ Have extra blankets, coats, hats, and gloves to keep warm. Please do not use gas-fueled appliances, like an oven, as an alternative-heating source. The same goes for wood-burning or liquid-fueled heating devices that are not designed to be used in a residential structure. Camp stoves and heaters should only be used out of doors in a well-ventilated area.

\_\_\_ Have plenty of flashlights and extra batteries on hand. Don't use candles for emergency lighting.

\_\_\_ Examine your smoke alarms now. Every fall, replace all batteries in all smoke alarms as a general fire safety precaution.

\_\_\_ Be prepared to relocate to a shelter for warmth and protection during a prolonged power outage.

For full text, see source: <http://www.crossnet.org/disaster/safetv/y2k.html>

### Editorial Advisory Board

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*FYI Briefs*

### Invitation to dialogue

What issues and concerns would you like to see addressed?

Contact FYI at:  
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### New Co-director for FYI

Bradford Sheafor is the new co-director of the Family and Youth Institute, along with Mary McPhail Gray. Dr. Sheafor is associate dean for research in the College of Applied Human Sciences and professor in the Department of Social Work at Colorado State University.

Dr. Sheafor is co-author of several social work textbooks, including *Techniques and Guidelines for Social Work Practice* and *Social Work: A Profession of Many Faces*. He received a B.S. and M.S.W. from the University of Kansas and a Ph.D. from the University of Denver.

**Coming next: Concerns About Violence**

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*Preparing for Y2K*

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*Providing research and education to communities,  
policy makers, and organizations that serve youth  
and families.*