

Is your home ready for Y2K?

Is your home ready for the new millennium? All the talk in the last few years about what will happen when the clock strikes midnight and we ring in the year 2000, is enough to send chills up anyone's spine.

Over the past several years, most governments, business and industries around the world have been working diligently to update computers and network systems in preparation for the grand occasion. In Canada, governments financial, housing, utility organizations have come up with a variety of solutions.

The millennium bug

This is the predicament faced by computer systems. While we all know that it's the year 2000, many devices with computer chips — from video cameras to high-tech coffee makers — may get confused and think it's the year 1900.

For homeowners, this means that appliances and electronic equipment that use dates, such as VCRs, televisions, radios, computers, fax machines, security systems etc., may get affected.

A bigger concern is whether utility companies will be able to supply electricity, natural gas, water and telephone services without any disruption. Most claim they have all major computer systems ready for the year 2000.

What can you do to prepare?

If you have newer electronic appliances and equipment that include dates in their function — Furnaces and electronic thermostats, heat pumps, security system, garage door openers, in house elevators and medical devices (oxygen, dialysis, personal alert, etc.) — check with the manufacturer or dealer to see if they are Y2K compliant.

Condominium owners and apartment dwellers, especially in high-rise units, should inquire about their building's central systems - front door openers, vestibule intercoms, security systems, elevators, etc. - to ensure contingency plans are in place.

Dealing with the millennium bug has been the focus of intense activity by the financial industry. Nevertheless, pay special attention to your record-keeping now and early in the new year. Check bill, financial statements and receipts carefully. Keep your transaction records from credit card, bank machine and debit card transactions and check these with your bank account statement.

Your personal computer

This is where problems may strike closer to home. The bug's origin dates back to the early days of the computer industry. This is when, in an effort to save valuable storage space, many computers were programmed with two numbers instead of four to denote the year. These systems may not be able to interpret 00 as 2000. This, in turn, may cause systems and products that rely on date-sensitive data to shut down or malfunction.

Here are a few ways to prepare:

- If your PC is fairly old and you've added a lot of programs over the years, you may have to do a lot of repair work - especially if you rely on it to organize your personal finances.

- If you work at home, are linked to an office, use E-mail often, regularly download programs from the internet, you should check all your business programs carefully for potential problems. A bug in one system may enter another system that's bug-free.



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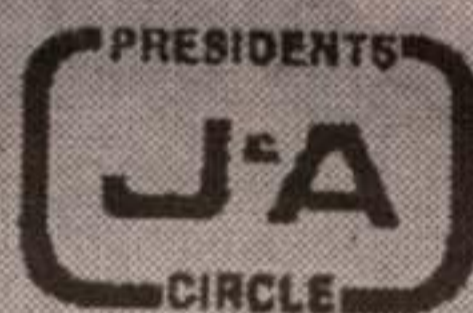


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