No glitches expected as clock strikes midnight

York Region has gotten out the heavy artillery to fight the Y2K bug, leaving officials confident there won't be major problems to interrupt millennium celebrations.

An extensive plan launched years ago to address potential problems is complete and all systems have been checked and double-checked. Should some unforeseen problems arise, there are back-up plans in place for most services, such as generators to replace electric power.

Hospitals are also prepared to work from hard copies should unexpected computer glitches occur.

"A lot of effort has been expended to make sure there isn't a problem. If there are problems, they'll probably be short-term glitches and may have nothing to do with Y2K," said Rob Prentice, Newmarket's corporate services director.

"People should enjoy the new year and not be anxious about it."

Newmarket Fire Chief John Molyneaux, who sits on the region's emergency control group, pointed out that North America has the highest state of readiness in the world.

'People should expect the normal inconveniences. The key message is not to panic.'

"There's a high degree of confidence. There may be inconvenient interruptions, but nothing large scale or long term," he said.

Prentice indicated there could be temporary brown-outs, or the phones may go out if everybody checks them at the same time, but heat and hydro should remain intact. There's also enough of a water supply in above-ground tanks to serve residents for several days should a problem arise.

"People should expect the normal inconveniences. The key message is not to panic," he said.

Should the phones fail, Prentice warns residents to run to the nearest police station or fire hall and to pay attention to the media for any additional instructions should problems occur.

All emergency services, hospitals and town offices will also have extra staff working during the Y2K transition period.

The region has a Y2K information line set up from 7 a.m. on Dec. 31 until 8 a.m. on Jan. 1, at 1-877-967-5457, but residents should still dial 911 for emergencies. It also has an emergency preparedness guidebook posted at www.region.york.on.ca

MILLENNIUM CHECKLIST

- Keep a three to four day supply of clean water on hand (about a litre per person per day);
- Stock up on dry or canned goods that require little or no cooking such as crackers, peanut butter, canned fish, trail mix and cereal;
- Have a battery-operated radio with extra batteries on hand;
- Keep flashlights with extra batteries readily available;
- Make sure there are fresh batteries in all smoke or carbon monoxide detectors;
- Keep extra clothing, such as mittens, sweaters, socks and boots on hand;
- Have a few extra dollars available (about $100) to purchase staples;
- Fill up your gas tank before the holidays;
- Have medical prescriptions on hand;
- Don't pick up the phone at midnight on New Year's Eve to see if it works or it could cause the phones to go down from an overload;
- Don't tie up 911 just to see if it works;
- Don't barbecue or keep propane or gasoline in the house.

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