

Y2K Newsletter

Issue #1

Department of Veterans Affairs

October 1999

VA is Y2K Okay

On March 31, 1999, VA successfully made its mission critical systems Year 2000 compliant. All payment-related applications, applications supporting health care, as well as applications supporting payroll, are ready. VA's Year 2000 readiness was demonstrated during a series of end-to-end process simulations in July and August, 1999, when VA information systems were advanced to January 2000. No Year 2000 problems were encountered during the final simulation, thereby providing additional assurance that the systems and transfer of data between VA, VHA, VBA, and Treasury FMS will operate normally in the Year 2000. Visit VA's Y2K web site for up-to-date information at: http://vaww.va.gov/Y2K_Resources.htm

Veterans will continue to receive their benefits on time, as well as the highest quality of health care in the Year 2000 and beyond.

Y2K Personal Readiness

For your personal Year 2000 planning, the Federal government and certain nonprofit and trade organizations have developed extensive information and guidelines. These are readily available through a number of sources: the World Wide Web, toll-free telephone, and at your local libraries. Here are some of the most frequently visited sites:

- *The Federal Government's Consumer Information Web Site*
Information on "Y 2 Care about Y2K: Checklist." This page has links to product safety, and provides a listing of state web sites and coordinators at:
<http://www.consumer.gov/y2k/index.html>.
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Find Your "Y2K Comfort Zone"

VA's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) staff is ready to help employees determine their own risk factors and make choices about Y2K preparedness. EAP also will help employees think through their own situation and find a "Y2K Comfort Zone" by discussing questions such as:

- What kind of community do you live in? Can you and your neighbors count on helping each other in time of need? How far are you from shops, services, and your workplace?
- Do you and your family members have special needs?
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Frequently Asked Questions

- Q. What is "Y2K" and why are people concerned?
- A. The Year 2000 technology "bug," as it is sometimes called, was created in the early days of computers when computer memory was scarce and expensive. Programmers took shortcuts whenever possible to save space. Instead of using a four-digit code for year dates, a two-digit entry was used.
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Y2K Personal Readiness (Continued from Page 1, Column 1)

- **Community Guide to Y2K**
This guide provides helpful hints on preparing your community. It highlights major areas of food, water, and power, along with other emergency information. It is available at libraries or online at: <http://www.itpolicy.gsa.gov/mks/yr2000/community/community.html>. The online guide has links to many other Y2K sites.
- **The Red Cross Y2K Preparedness Guide**
This guide not only gives information on Y2K, but other important information for preparing for disasters in general. The guide is available at local chapters or online at: <http://www.redcross.org/disaster/safety/y2k.html>
- **The FEMA Y2K Consumers Guide**
The guide contains topics such as risks, dates to be concerned about, taking care of your own personal computer, and caring for your personal business. It gives an overview of what may be happening around the world to prepare for Y2K. It is available by calling 1-888-261-6214 to order printed copy or online at: <http://www.fema.gov/y@k/bltn00.htm>
- **The President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion Web Site**
Information on the Federal government's efforts to prepare for Y2K and information for students are available here. It is regularly updated and links to other important Y2K sites. It is available at: <http://www.y2k.gov>
- **The Odin Group's Y2K Health Care Personal Planning Guide**
Consumer questions on Y2K's impact on health care are addressed here. Suggestions are provided for how to plan for the Year 2000 date change. It is available at: <http://www.healthcarey2kguide.com>

Additionally, the Federal government maintains "The Federal Year 2000 Information Center," a Year 2000 question and information toll free

telephone site at: 1-888-USA-4Y2K – (1-888-872-4925). Call OPM's toll-free Fax-Back Line: 1-877-750-0177. Select a topic from the menu and receive faxed information immediately.

Finding Your "Y2K Comfort Zone" (Continued from Page 1, Column 2)

- Think about ways you and your family can prepare for Y2K. What kinds of items should you store?
- In case you are without normal utilities, how would your family keep up its morale? Do you have non-electric toys for young children and books, games, musical instruments, or hobby equipment for older children and adults?

The most important thing to remember about Y2K, is the more you know about it, the easier it will be to prepare for it.

Frequently Asked Questions (Continued from Page 1, Column 2)

- A. (Continued) This practice persisted, long after the need for saving space was eliminated. The two-digit code also was used in embedded chips, which exist in many devices that control processes, functions, machines (like VCR's), building ventilation systems, elevators, and fire and security alarm systems, which are part of our everyday lives.

When the Year 2000 comes, programs that have been coded with two-digit year codes will not distinguish between the years 2000 and 1900. If the program includes time-sensitive calculations or comparisons, results are unpredictable. No one knows what problems may occur, how widespread they may be, or how long they will last. The good news is that federal, state, and local governments; banks and other financial institutions; retail businesses, and every other group affected by this problem have been working to resolve it, and a great deal of progress has been made. (Continued on Page 3, Column 1)

Frequently Asked Questions (Continued from Page 2, Column 2)

Q. *When could Y2K problems happen?*

A. Most people anticipate Y2K problems may happen December 31, 1999, at midnight. Many experts predict that the problem is more likely to be a persistent one over a few years rather than a single “crash.” Because no one can be certain about the effects of the Y2K problem, the American Red Cross has developed a checklist. It contains some easy steps you can take to prepare for possible disruptions. Go to the Red Cross web site at: <http://www.redcross.org/disaster/safety/y2k.html>

Q. *What if unforeseen Y2K problems disrupt the Federal Government activities on January 3? How will I know if I should report to work?*

A. We believe that the Federal government will be ready for the next millennium, and we are confident that VA has taken the necessary steps to avoid major disruptions in Federal computer systems. However, we recognize that disruptions resulting from non-Federal system problems are possible, particularly in Federal installations located in isolated areas or outside the United States. Local VA sites will provide emergency dismissal or closure procedures specifically to apply to the event of possible work disruptions associated with unanticipated Year 2000 (Y2K) computer conversion problems in January 2000. VA will identify “emergency employees” and notify them in writing that they are designated as “emergency employees.” For purposes of possible Y2K work disruptions, “emergency employees” will include those on the agency’s “business recovery team” or “day 1 team.”

Q. *I plan to select a new health insurance carrier during the FEHB Open Season (November 8 - December 13, 1999). What if I need to see my doctor in January and do not receive a card from my insurance company due to their Y2K problems?*

A. Employees who make open season enrollments and enrollment changes may be very anxious to receive their new ID cards. Make your selection as early as possible during the FEHB Open Season. The carriers will then have time to complete the work necessary to issue ID cards prior to January 1, 2000.

Q. *I manage a staff dedicated to solving Y2K problems. What can I do to keep employees’ morale and health intact as they dedicate themselves to the challenge of solving a complex set of problems?*

A. “Managing for Y2K in the Federal Workforce: The Human Element (Some Workable Do’s and Don’ts for Federal Managers)” is available online at: <http://www.opm.gov/y2k/index.htm>. OPM developed this document which provides examples of “best practices” used by agencies in managing their Y2K workforce.

Q. *I am a computer programmer working on Y2K and have many hours of use or lose annual leave. I don’t want to lose any of it. Is there any way I can restore it and carry it over?*

A. Yes. Guidance is provided in Flyer 051-201. It can be found online at: <http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm>.

Q. *My personal computer (PC) is over five-years-old. Will it work on January 1, 2000?*

**A. PC’s purchased before mid-1997 have hardware that could be vulnerable to the Y2K issue. In particular, the PC’s “BIOS” chip, which stores basic information about the computer and accesses its electronic calendar, could be affected. Software used for word processing, graphics, and games probably will not be affected by the Y2K issue. Software used for applications where year dates are critical, such as in spreadsheets, money management, and personal organizer programs, could have problems and need to be checked.
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(Frequently Asked Questions (Continued from Page 3, Column 2))

A. *(Continued)* Most computer and software manufacturers offer extensive information about how the Y2K issues could affect their products. Fixes or “patches” can often be downloaded from the Internet. Check manufacturer web sites for more information.

Q. *I am worried about getting paid in January. Is the VA’s payroll system Y2K compliant?*

A. Yes. All Y2K modifications to the Personnel Accounting Integrated Data (PAID) System are completed and extensively tested. Transmissions to the Department of Treasury and other agencies also have been tested to ensure direct deposits and checks will be on time and accurate.

Q. *What about my bank account, credit cards, ATMs??? Should I take out a lot of cash and put it under my mattress?*

A. It is extremely unlikely that the Y2K issue will cause banks and other financial institutions to lose track of your money. Financial institutions have been working hard to make sure that computers used for record keeping will be ready for the Year 2000 and most financial institutions are required to keep backup copies of critical books and records stored in electronic form.

Federal financial regulatory agencies like the Federal Reserve and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation have conducted multiple examinations of their progress and have found that virtually all Federally insured depository institutions are expected to be ready for the date change.

Q. *I am working many long hours on a Y2K emergency project. What is the maximum amount of premium pay I can be paid for this work?*

A. An employee who is performing work in connection with the Y2K conversion emergency may be paid premium pay under

the annual limitation of GS-15, step 10. This means that the GS employee may not exceed the annual rate for GS-15, step 10. Normally, there is a GS-15, step 10, biweekly pay cap on such pay.

Topics in Future Issues

- Y2K Impact on Airline Travel
- Y2K and Health Issues
- Personal Finances
- Ready Your Home for Y2K



The Y2K Newsletter is presented to you by the Y2K Management Team, Employee Assistance Program, and the Office of Human Resources Management.

If you would like your questions answered in future issues, send them to Linda Settle, Customer Advisory and Consulting Group, 051B, VACO, via e-mail or call (202) 273-9838.