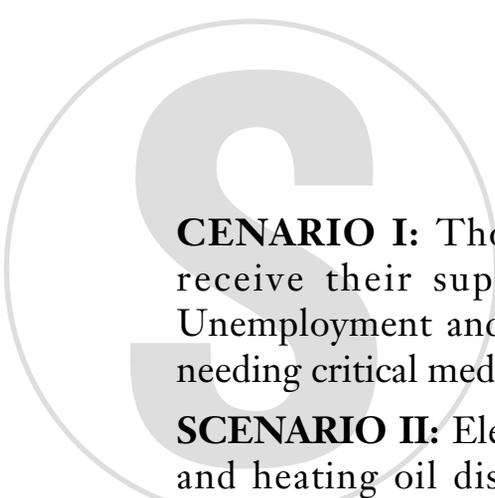




# THE “MORNING AFTER” THE MILLENNIUM

HOW TO CREATE A **PLAN B** TO SURVIVE THE YEAR-2000 BUG.

BY BRUCE GLASRUD



**SCENARIO I:** Thousands of families on public assistance didn't receive their support checks. Food stamps are unavailable. Unemployment and social security payments are in arrears. People needing critical medications can't obtain them.

**SCENARIO II:** Electric power is off in much of the city. Natural gas and heating oil distribution has been interrupted. Food is being stripped off food shelves. With rumors that supplies won't be restocked for several days, people are panicking. Many other cities are in the same condition.

**SCENARIO III:** United Way sent you its usual funding check—except this one is off. . . way off. Your local government's fee-for-service contract check hasn't arrived at all. How are you going to meet payroll? How will you pay vendors and office rent? You'll have to worry about that later. Your most immediate problem is that your database is acting wacky. You can't get into the files you need. Your clients are waiting for services and are unusually agitated today. Hey, where is the rest of your staff anyway? Are they all having car problems?

The above scenarios could happen soon to your community and your organization. That's the bad news. If you want good news, it's that you can plan on when the bad news is likely to happen: *January 1, 2000*.

That's when the "Year-2000 bug" will strike, making many computers unable to process certain date-sensitive data. Governments, corporations, and nonprofits are working with various degrees of diligence and success to solve the problem. Many computer specialists are commanding \$300-\$600 an hour to help.

Unless it's fixed, the Year-2000 bug could create many disastrous effects in the community:

**Banking:** There could be delays in funds transfer, errors in account maintenance, credit card and ATM malfunctions, and loan-rate miscalculations. There may even be "bank holidays," in which banks simply close down.

**Commerce:** Manufacturing suspensions, ordering and billing lags, and serious delivery delays could occur.

**Transportation:** Scheduling foul-ups, maintenance errors, global positioning system failures, vehicle and aircraft malfunctions, and traffic control tie-ups may force vehicles to a halt.

**Utilities:** Electrical and communications systems may overload. Gas and oil deliveries could be interrupted. There may be water and natural gas metering errors and overbilling.

**Government:** Some agencies may just operationally go belly-up, at least for awhile. This could cause serious safety, security, and governance problems.

**Other Consequences:** Computer glitches in the health care, education, and communications sectors could cause many long-term rippling repercussions.

Most government, corporate, and nonprofit entities have programmers working on their computer systems at this very moment. With massive last-minute influxes of money, time, and expertise, they may have their systems "Year-2000 compliant" and functioning by the "magic date." Yet, if even a few companies and agencies aren't debugged, a crisis could occur, as a malfunction in one part of our entangled infrastructure causes a domino effect throughout the entire system.

Remember, too, that those hard-pressed computer programmers make mistakes—even at \$600 an hour! Software bugs are omnipresent, and one good glitch can induce another.

Thus, it's vital that you have a "Plan B" for the year 2000. Here are steps to ensure that your clients will continue to be served even if you face a Year-2000 crisis:

## 1. Prepare Emergency Plans for Clients.

Consider what your program participants and recipients may encounter, and prepare accordingly. Some examples:

- If you're a food pantry, stock up with nonperishables.
- If you're a mental health clinic, stockpile critical medication for your clients.

- If you're a childcare center, lay up an extra supply of diapers, and schedule additional staff.
- If your nonprofit isn't in the human services, consider offering back-up emergency assistance to organizations that are.

## 2. Create Back-Up Payment Plans.

For example:

- Have crisis funds ready in case you don't receive checks from funders on time.
- Envision alternative ways to pay your employees and creditors in case your bank's systems fail.

These actions are truly proactive. They require foresight, alternative planning, and, for some nonprofits, substantial risk-taking. Still, such actions are much healthier for your organization and your community than risk-avoidance. At the very least, a good "Plan B" will gain you a peg-up on whatever "Murphy's Law" dishes out in the beginning of our new century. ■

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