Year 2000 Problems?
By Chuck Wilson,
UNH T² Center Project Assistant

You might have heard about the Y2K or the millennium bug. In our computer-based society, the bug is controversial. The Y2K bug denotes the fact that some older computer chips with date-keeping devices, or recent computers with old programs, will not function properly, or at all, on and after January 1, 2000.

Nearly all devices containing microchips, such as computers, traffic signals, elevators, and security systems, have stored dates or require a date to run. Many will not recognize the year 2000 as a valid date. Older microchips store dates in month/day/year format as MM/DD/YY. Since the year term (YY) may recognize a 00 entry only as the year 1900, the device will not register the year 2000.

Some computers will operate into the year 2000. The truth is, no one really knows what will happen, and there is a lot of speculation. Hardware and software that is not Y2K complaint might crash causing costly delays, errors, and lost information. For example, if your pay period contains the date December 31, 1999 within the interval, you might not get paid the correct amount, if any amount at all. The same applies to mortgages, insurance, credit cards, and mutual funds, just to name a few. As of January 1 2000, computers might not be able to record payments made by customers at various institutions, but money is not the only concern.

Of specific concern to public works officials are computer-run, date-sensitive traffic signals. Many types of signals exist in throughout the state of New Hampshire. Some signals are as simple as a constant blinking light while others operate from centralized computer systems. These systems are tied to local controllers at sequential intersections. To lessen the number of accidents, many variables are considered when designing a traffic signal system. Many signals are run by time-based coordination meaning certain days of the year, such as holidays, the signal may operate slower or faster, or maybe not at all.

The following companies assured me that their traffic signals were tested and will operate correctly through the year 2000:
- Electric Light
- East Coast Signal
- Econolite Control Products, Inc
- Naztec
- Traffic Engineering Sales, Inc.
- Peek Traffic, Inc

Some larger companies that manufacture traffic signals have devoted an entire department solely for Year 2000 projects. One company, 3M, told me that only its Opticom Priority Control System Series 500 will indirectly be affected by the rollover. The model 562IS-interface software

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Milestones:

*Dennis Allen* is the new Road Agent in Tilton.

*Robert Bennett* is the new Public Works Director in Belmont.

*Edwin Mattson* is no longer the Road Agent in Fitzwilliam.

*Bruce MacBrien* has joined the Town of Meredith as their Assistant Public Works Director.

Websites:

There are many helpful websites for Public Works employees. Here are just a few. If you have others that your colleagues could benefit from, send the urls to kathy.desroches@unh.edu. We’ll publish the site and your name in Road Business (no commercial sites please).

UNH T² Center:
http://www.t2.unh.edu

http://www.ohs fhwa dot gov/devices/mutcd/html

New MUTCD

http://www. ems .psu.edu/wx/newx .html
http://www.intellicast .com/weather/bos/nexrad/

Two useful sites that provide a range of weather information. Information provided by Dave Barker, Director of Administrative Services, Town of Epping.

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(DOS version), which is used in a laptop computer to download reports from the Series 500 system, will not accommodate the change to Year 2000. They recommend that any municipality that uses this software purchase the Windows-based 750IS interface software. A representative from 3M asserted that the actual field equipment will run fine on January 1, 2000, and that the software is the only potential problem.

Finally, some readers are probably wondering what will happen to such computer programs as RSMS, SIMS, and MEMS. Each of these programs issued after 1996 have been tested for the Year 2000. They are Y2K compliant. However, in general, highway agencies using 386 or 486 computers should consider upgrading. These older models might have internal problems not found in the modern Pentium.

If you are worried about your PC, here are a few things to consider in checking your system for Y2K compliance:

1. Check the date that comes up when you boot your computer—it should be a four-digit year. If not, call your PC manufacturer for fixes or patches.

2. Test your computer by setting the clock to December 31, 1999 and see if it crashes. Or use a free test program located on the web at: http://www.nstl.com/html/ymark_2000.html.

3. Windows 95 has some problems, download fixes from:
http://www. microsoft .com/ithome/topics/year2k or buy the Windows 98 upgrade.

4. Check with your software manufacturers to make sure it is Y2K compliant, or check online using a search engine such as Yahoo or Excite.

5. If your system is networked. Ensure the network hardware and software are Year 2000 compliant.

Sources:
Better Roads, August 1998
Consumer Reports, August 1998

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