Y2K - 1

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The current year is 1999. Though I am not an End-time believer, I am sure that there is a diabolical event waiting for us at the end of the century. A problem we have never encountered in the history of mankind. Taking advantage of this speech, I would like people to be aware and prepared for the so-called Y2K.

Y2K (Y standing for 'year' and K standing for 'kilo' which means 1,000) has obtained its citizenship of symbolizing the various problems of the year 2,000 computer glitch. This was created in the early 1950's when software programmers started using 2 digit year formats to represent date fields. For example, 1996 is written as 96 and the software simply assumes that the first 2 digits are 19. So it never reaches the year 2,000 and computers malfunction since programs are written to repeat its operations day after day.

And recently people have discovered that there is another element that can cause the Y2K called the embedded systems. These are the microprocessors, now in almost everything from VCRs to traffic lights to nuclear weapons. And 1-5 % of these embedded chips are positive to be effected. The percentage is low but since there is an estimated 50 billion chips on the face of this earth, even 1% means 500 million Y2K time bombs. On December 31st 1999, machines with embedded chips might just turn from a carriage into a pumpkin at the chime of midnight.

Okay, I know some of you are still thinking "Come on. People didn't just wake up yesterday and discover the millennium, and this bug, just around the corner." Well I was no where different until August 22nd this year when 95 thousand car navigation systems broke down due to the date rollover of the Global Positioning Satellite. The GPS, known for guiding the tomahawk missiles during the Gulf War had been predicted to affect automatic vehicle locators on that exact date. After this incident the Y2K was no longer a cultish prophecy but a logical reasonable scientific notification.

The disaster in the aftermath are calculated to be devastating. The most serious problems concerning human lives are high-tech equipment within the hospitals. In the state of California, 7 major

hospitals tested their medical appliances and found out that 18% of them will malfunction including pacemakers and life-supporting systems. What can jeopardize our daily lives are the shutdowns of gas, waterworks, and sewer systems. Telephones cut off and stores running out of stock. A complete blackout in the middle of winter. All of these are the potentials of Y2K, shutting down life as we know it and turning our information age into a digitally dysfunctional society.

For the past 5 years programmers have been teaching the computers to recognize the new century with methods such as '4 digit extension' or 'windowing'. However the problem is after making the corrections the systems must be tested, taking a great amount of time. And 'time' is the one thing we don't have.

Gartner group, a consulting firm that's made Y2K a specialty ranked Japan the slowest among the developed countries in preparedness though our nation is much more dependent on computers and technologies compared to others. We lack consciousness because the ultimate goal of any technical effort is to determine that the "before" and "after" systems are functionally equivalent. This issue also has an uncertainty that the computer experts might be wrong.

But the Y2K is not a question of who's right. It's a question of mitigating the consequences of who's wrong. And this must be done. If the government is slow in action, we must do it ourselves.

The bottom line is accepting the Y2K as an inescapable issue. Don't turn your back but face it. The consequences will differ whether you are determined or panicking. It may be impossible to solve the social chaos with your own strength but the chaos and anxiety within is something you can deal with by your awareness. You should start by thinking what influences Y2K will have, and what Y2K will mean to you and your family.

Lastly the most important thing is to start contingency planning for a worst-case scenario as soon as possible. It will be best if we think of this Y2K similar to a great earthquake. Because I believe this is the first time we were able to predict with such accuracy a worldwide disaster of this magnitude. The only thing different from an earthquake is that we know this one's coming. So a significant thing on individual basis is to ensure a sense of security. And the degree is different for each individual so we must think for ourselves and start stockpiling food, water, power resources, etc. The point is to implement risk-management and be prepared.

If we can carry these things out, digital apocalypse, like most things will be a matter of perspective. The Y2K will become a good chance to reconsider our ways and values of life. And one thing will be clear. In a century in which man split the atoms, sliced genes and turned silicon into data, the tale of Y2K will not be remembered as our final hour. We will live on. We will survive. This year is 1999, the year before 2,000. We have 35 days to go till judgment day. I wish you luck and have a happy new year!