

Family Living Focus

by
Multi-County
Extension Agent

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Preparing for Y2K

Three winters ago, after facing what seemed like a ton of snow with only two (seemingly) small shovels, my husband and I decided to buy a snow blower.

Never again, we vowed, would be caught without the proper preparation for such a storm!

Looking back, buying the snow blower was the best weather insurance we could have bought—because we have had hardly any snow since. Undoubtedly, if we had not made this purchase, every winter would have met us with a big pile of white.

While we are a little disappointed that we have never gotten to try our equipment out, it seems to be better safe than sorry (and sore from shoveling). That's the way I tend to think of the challenge of "Y2K."

"Y2K," or the "Millennium Bug," are terms used when we talk about the Year 2000 computer problem. This problem was planted years ago, with seeds that may come to fruition as the year ends. In a nutshell, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s—when computers were first

built—computer programmers used two numbers instead of four, to save space, when indicating the year. For example, 1963 was abbreviated as "63" and 1991 as "91." Many of the systems that were set up back then were supposed to be changed as equipment was modernized, so that computers would interpret "00" as 2000 rather than 1900.

Unfortunately, out of habit or because of cost cutting, many computer programmers continued to use the two number format when developing newer systems rather than four, making this concern a real one for us today. Many computers, and the software they run, will not continue to do their job when they show 01/01/00 (January 1, 2000). Some people believe that since they don't own a computer, they will not be affected—but this concern reaches beyond just computer hardware. Small computers, called microprocessors or computer chips, run machines such as elevators, VCRs and common household appliances. Banks, accountants, and doctors' offices keep computerized records important to all of us. Companies that supply water

and electricity also rely on computers and microprocessors, which means that all of us have ways computers affect our daily lives, whether we realize it or not.

Because computers touch our lives in many ways, it is important to know what is reasonable to do in response to the "Y2K" problem, and what is not. Some people have been contacted by people selling a service or product that is supposed to remedy mishaps that the year 2000 might bring. Close reviews of the claims made, or opinions of a reliable, unbiased source, are helpful in protecting yourself from fraud.

In addition, many people have advocated stockpiling months of water, food, cash and medicine to prepare for potential emergencies. While some preparation for Y2K may be necessary, in reality, if everyone begins to create a stockpile, it will be people, and not computers, that will create the shortages that are feared.

So, what should a person do?

According to the American Red Cross, you should prepare for the year 2000 like you would prepare for a severe winter storm—by keeping a one to two week supply of essential food, water, and medicine. Our state and federal governments, the electrical power companies, and banking institutions have been preparing for the beginning of next year for some time, and those things that might happen on the first day of 2000 should be small, and short-lived. Emergency management personnel have reported that, of the systems that do not work correctly on January 1, 80 percent

will be back online within three days.

In the same way a snowstorm would cause brown-outs, Y2K may cause some electrical, gas, water and sewer system disruption. This means preparing to keep warm and comfortable, to be able to cook food and have light in our houses safely.

Just as a snow storm might cause you to be unable to get to a pharmacy or grocery store, or cause the store to be closed, so Year 2000 problems may cause checkout scanners not to work correctly, or delay deliveries of medicine and food items to your area. In such an emergency, a few canned or dried food favorites, and several weeks of your needed medication, will be welcome, and keep things as

close to normal as possible.

If you wish to prepare for your "Y2K" storm, you'll want to review the information on the Red Cross website, <http://www.redcross.org/>, or stop in at your county Cooperative Extension Office to pick up a copy of the pamphlet, "Consumers and the Year 2000 (Y2K)." Both give a clear checklist of steps that everyone might take to be ready for emergencies.

Maybe you won't need the precautions any more than we seem to have needed our snowblower—but they say "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." By following the guidelines set, in preparing over the next eight months, we'll all be able to welcome the new year on January 1.

Cruise For Calcium

ROSEMONT, Ill. — This spring and summer, a fleet of "milk mustache mobiles" will be rolling through 100 cities across the country as part of the nation's largest grassroots campaign to educate Americans about the health benefits of milk, according to Dairy Management Inc.™ which represents dairy farmers throughout the nation.

The "Milk Mustache Mobile 100-City Cruise for Calcium" is part of a \$187 million integrated milk marketing plan developed and funded by U.S. dairy farmers and processors to help increase fluid milk sales.

"The national marketing plan, together with stepped-up marketing efforts of branded companies to promote milk, will help build strong demand," says Charles

Powell, vice president of milk marketing for Dairy Management Inc.™.

"When the 'Cruise for Calcium' tour visits the region, the organizations will work with local dairy processors, schools, hospitals, grocery stores, and others to help spread the word on dairy's health benefits," says Powell. "Health professionals will conduct bone density testing for those at risk of osteoporosis to underscore the importance of calcium as part of a healthy diet over a lifetime. We want consumers to know there's not a 'quick fix' for calcium deficiencies — and it's never too early to start drinking more milk."

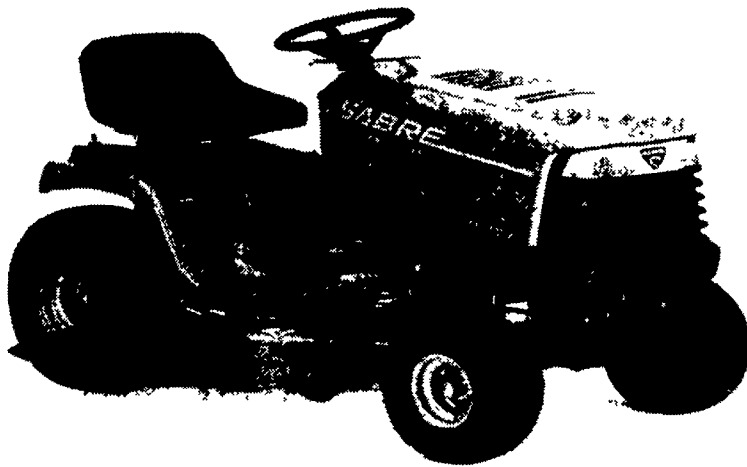
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