

**HOW WILL LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMUNICATE
WITH THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE BY THE
YEAR 2008?**

JOURNAL ARTICLE

**JAMES R. DAVIS
EL CAJON POLICE DEPARTMENT**

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

GET READY BECAUSE HERE IT COMES

Community Preparation is the most important part

Ok, so you think you're ready for the dreaded "Y2K Bug." You've examined and tested all your internal computer programs. Where necessary, you've replaced programs that were non-Y2K compliant with those that are. You're smart enough to ensure that any new programs that you bought came with a written guarantee from the manufacturer that they would be Y2K compliant or the manufacturer will be responsible for any loss of time, etc. You've checked all the embedded chips in your elevators, time clock, signal lights, etc., and filled out survey after survey for the state about your preparedness. Meetings have been held with the local utilities and everyone has assured you that they are, or will be ready for Y2K. Whew! I know you're glad that's done now off to the golf course. Right? Wrong!

What about your community? How prepared are they? Do they know what to expect? How will they react to crisis, real or imagined, at 12:01, January 1, 2000?

I believe no matter how prepared we think we are for Y2K, if we do not ensure that our respective communities are prepared, know what to expect or who to contact with questions when the unexpected happens, and the unexpected will happen, (remember Murphy) all of our technical preparations will not be enough to stave off fear and panic.

Consider a moment what we are about to face. There are people in our communities who believe we are approaching the Apocalypse, the end of the world. The Israelis will not say what they are doing to prepare but will say that they have been preparing for years for the influx of people who want to be in the holy land for the, best case new millennium, worst case, end of the world. New businesses are sprouting up daily selling everything from the survival food to wind up radios, because, Hey, you just never know. Books are being published about surviving the coming computer crashes and people are buying and moving to remote locations because they fear the results of the Y2K. The fact is that your technical preparation should have started a long time ago. Most public agencies have either completed or are very close to completing the Y2K fixes in mission critical areas. Steven Meer, Vice President and Chief Technology Officer for S.C.C Communications Corporation was recently quoted, "My opinion is that, in general, the public safety industry is doing a really good job."¹

The most important question is, however, what is the public's perception? Nearly one in four Americans believe the Y2K problem could affect them directly. Of that group, 80% are concerned that their financial records may be destroyed and 56% are worried that they will lose their jobs.² The concerns are not isolated to any one economic group. A CNN poll of 1,067 adults show that 53% of them believe that the banking system will likely be disrupted as a result of Y2K and plan to withdraw cash from their account.³ Your average bank only has about two cents for every dollar deposited on hand. You do the math. The

Federal Government plans to print billions of dollars to help with the anticipated demand for cash. So just think about what this means to law enforcement. More cash in homes means more vulnerable public. More cash on hand at the banks means more vulnerable financial institutions. Either way it spells great opportunity for bad guys. And that's only one aspect of the problem. Scam artists will undoubtedly play on the fear generated by the news media hungry for stories potential Y2K problems.

Many people are beginning or planning to hord food and emergency supplies. Steve Portela, the manager of Walton Feed (a bulk food supplier in Idaho) says that items ordered as of February will not be delivered until July 1999. Mr. Portela states "We have an incredible backlog". Traditionally, their largest customer is the Morman Church. They have seen their business boom after every disaster such as the San Francisco earthquake, grain shortages and the Gulf War. Mr. Portela says, "Y2K is bigger than all of them combined." People in other parts of the country are storing gasoline, food, weapons, ammuniton, and preparing to move into specially made self-efficient homes in anticipation of Y2K.⁴

Even some of the more positive headlines such as the one seen in USA Today on March 10 "Pole finds many less fearful but preparing for Y2K" still contain many areas of concern for our communities. In the USA Today article it states while people don't believe this will be a world ending situation, 55% still say that it's likely that banking and accounting systems will fail; 43% say it is likely that air traffic control system will fail; and 40% say grocery and other store shortages are likely.⁵

I think the situation best summarized by an article by Mark Larson where he states, "The fear surrounding Y2K is the biggest concern. Much of it is fueled by incomplete, inaccurate and/or distorted information. (Hollywood isn't helping matters. At least two "Y2K disaster movies" are to be released this summer. Imagine the reaction from folks who really do rely on fictional films as their source of "news".)⁶

The chances are if you are reading this article you're a law enforcement professional. You know that the best way to stop a rumor or calm a situation is by straight talk, accurate information, and open and honest communication. Most police departments in the country claim to follow a community policing motto. This is our chance to practice that motto on perhaps the most important issue we will face in our career.

Each community is different so no one blue print will fit all situations. What follows is a description of what our community is planning on doing. I hope you will take this, apply it to your own community, and give me some feedback on things you've found work on your community.

First some interesting facts about the new millennium. In January 1, 1999, the article titled "Soon, The Clock Will Turn on Ten Centuries" Dean Calbreath dispels a number of myths about the year 2000. Calbreath believes that the calculation done to establish our current

calendar are off by at least two to six years. This would mean that the third millennium should have started between 1994 and 1998. Until 1622, the new year was celebrated on March 25, marking the traditional date when Mary conceived Jesus. In 1622, the Vatican moved "New Year" to January 1.

Clearly this information has nothing to do with what will happen to our technology on January 1, 2000. It does have application to the beliefs held by many cults.⁷

In informal surveys of our community (including business people), we find that what people want to know is: When I turn on my tap will there be drinkable water; when I flush my toilet will it go away; will my telephone and electricity work; will I be able to get in touch with emergency services; will grocery stores have food available and will they be able to sell it to me; will I be able to travel from my home to the store safely, are my savings and investments safe - in short will all the services that we have all become accustomed to and taken for granted be there on January 1, 2000.

As the answer to these questions are investigated, it is important for us to approach them as we would any other investigation. We need and our community has a right to expect the unvarnished truth. If we expect problems, the community needs to know what those problems are. Where the information is incomplete or untested, we need to present it in just that way "we don't know" or we will continue to investigate. Where the information is clear, however, the public needs to hear that as well.

We are taking several steps to get the information out to our community. First, in cooperation with our fire department and Chamber of Commerce, we are planning a series of four community meetings, starting in late April and ending in June (more may be scheduled as the need arises).

The first three meetings will be held in three separate city facilities chosen to be geographically convenient for the community. At the first three meetings, community members will hear from representatives from San Diego Gas and Electric/Sempra Energy, Pacific Bell, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Helix Water Authority, representatives from the grocery industry, City of El Cajon and the El Cajon Fire and Police Department.

Each presenter will have approximately fifteen minutes to discuss their companies or organizations preparations for Y2K. The companies will also discuss how they are ensuring that all of the people with whom they do business are also prepared for Y2K. Our department will talk about the kinds of criminal activity we expect and what the community can do to help us help them. Particular emphasis will be placed on crimes against the elderly, small businesses and hazards associated with keeping large sums of cash at home. A question and answer session will round out each program.

The fourth program will feature speakers from the office of Disaster Preparedness and the El Cajon Fire Department. The focus of this program will be on emergency preparedness. The plan is not emphasize disaster preparation for Y2K but rather to emphasize the fact that natural and man-made disasters are part of life. No matter where one lives in the United States, one should always be prepared to provide for themselves and their families for a period of roughly 96 hours in the event of a major disaster. Prudent preparation in the form of basic such as food, water, communication, medicines and so on for ones family should be something we prepare for as a matter of course and not necessarily because of fears or concerns surrounding Y2K.

Information, support material and links to other credible Y2K sources will be posted on our City's web site and local businesses subscribing to our e-mail service will get updates as they become available.

Second, we will be preparing our employees. We want to be sure that they have access to the same information that is going out to the community at large. Should a problem occur, they will be the ones called upon to help resolve it. It is imperative that our employees and their families are prepared and have available to them the most factual up-to-date information that we can provide.

Third, all the law enforcement agencies in San Diego County will be meeting in early April to compare plans and preparations for Y2K. At our first meeting we plan to brainstorm issues, possible events, and crime trends surrounding Y2K. For example, we believe scams and frauds will be a significant part of the crime potential as we approach Y2K. As such, we may need to redirect some of our resources and bolster communications between agencies such as the District Attorney's Office, Chamber of Commerce, the Better Business Bureau and others in private industry to increase our ability to anticipate, identify and investigate this criminal activity. Education and prevention will be high priority.

The good news is that most major groups in this country are ready. In the federal government, 24 of the largest agencies - 92% are Y2K compliant. All the rest are expected to be ready by the end of October 1999.⁸ All major utilities state that they are or will be by June 1999 Y2K compliant.⁹

The truth is that no one knows (or can know) every aspect of what will happen on January 1, 2000. For that matter, it is also true that no one really knows what will happen tomorrow. We cannot be paralyzed on what we don't know. We must concentrate identifying sources of information and planning for what we find out. The advantage to law enforcement around the Y2K issue is that we have a date (or in reality dates) certain for which we can plan and prepare. Our communities are depending on us to do our best.

RESOURCE LIST

1. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) has published "Preparing Law Enforcement for Y2K". This is an excellent overview of the issues with planning guides and a very comprehensive resource list. (WWW.THEIACT.ORG)
2. The Year 2000 Web Page: <http://www.year2000.com>, "Offers links to hundreds of articles and resources on the Year 2000 problem" FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, "Computers, the Year 2000 and Law Enforcement", Clyde B. Eisenberg, M.S., and Teresa F. Slattery.
3. Federal Government Information:
<http://www.itpolicy.gas.gov/mks/yr2000/y2khome.ht>, "Provides an information directory of the federal government's Year 2000 effort", *ibid*.
4. Year 2000 Manager's Toolbox: <http://www.govexec.com/tech/year2000>, "Discusses Year 2000 concerns that managers need to know", *ibid*.
5. Year 2000 Resources: <http://www.computerworld.com/res/year-2000.html>, "Offers a variety of resources concerning the year 2000 problem", *ibid*.
6. WWW.CIVIC.COM
This is an excellent source of a variety of articles concerning the governments preparation for year 2000 and where to find help for year 2000 preparations.
7. WWW.GOVTECH.NET
This is an excellent source of information regarding technology in general as well as the Year 2000 preparation information.
8. Police Executive Research Forum: WWW.POLICEFORUM.ORG
An excellent pointer to research with some papers specifically on point with Y2K.
9. Governing: WWW.GOVERNING.COM

ENDNOTES

1. Lois Pilant, Police Chief Magazine, "Preparing for the Year Two-thousand" as quoted from Steven Meer, Vice President and Chief Technology of S.C.C. Communications Corporation, p.50.
2. Patrick Thivodeau and Matt Hamblen, Computer World, "Study Finds Americans Fear Millennium Bug" Posted on CNN Web Site, (June 25, 1998)
3. CNN Web Site, CNN Pole: "Many Foresee Y2K Cash Crunch, Few Fear Doomday" (January 10, 1999) as posted on CNN Web Site.
4. David Hays and Finn Bollers of the Kansas City Star, San Diego Union Tribune, "Worried People Stock Up For Great Computer Crash of 2000" (February 1, 1999) p. 8.
5. Jim Norman, USA Today, "Pole finds many less fearful but preparing for Y2K"(Wednesday, March 10, 1999) p. 1A.
6. Daily Californian, "Some doomsdayers are Y2K bug are hoping for wide-spread panic" (February 2, 1999) p. A3.
7. Dean Calbreath, San Diego Union Tribune, "Soon the Clock Will turn on 10 Centuries" (January 1, 1999) p. A-1.
8. Un-kyung Kim, Associated Press, "Fed (most) Y2K ready, 92% of largest agencies checked out" (March 31, 1999) as posted on ABC.com Web site.
9. San Diego City Council, Rules Committee, Mayor's Conference on Year 2000 preparation (March 4, 1999)