



FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

# Consumer Bulletin

E. LEON JACOBS, JR., COMMISSIONER

## *The Introduction and* **Y2K READINESS**

I would like to introduce myself to you. I am E. Leon Jacobs, Jr. and, as many of you already know, I am a Commissioner with the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC). I was appointed a Commissioner in January 1998 by the late Governor Lawton Chiles. This monthly column was previously written for you by former Commissioner Julia L. Johnson. Former Commissioner Johnson, who now distinguishes herself by leading the Governor's Information Services Task Force, did an excellent job of providing you with pertinent information on utility-related issues. I hope to continue that effort to be sure that the issues that affect you, your family and your community are adequately explained.

I would now like to focus on an issue the Commission feels is extremely important -- the Year 2000 computer bug. I feel certain that all of you have heard about Y2K. You have probably asked yourself, will I be able to get my money out of the bank? Will I be able to buy groceries? Should I fly, or will the plane fall out of the sky? These issues have been raised in public forums all over the country. The government has been involved in preparing all of its agencies for the Year 2000 computer switchover. Utility companies have also been working especially hard to get ready for January 1, 2000.

Allow me to briefly explain Y2K. Although it may have many names -- the Y2K bug, the Millennium Bug, and the Year 2000 problem among them -- they all mean the same thing. The Y2K problem is caused by a shortcut used many years ago to conserve computer memory space. (Computer programmers used two numbers to record the year -- for example, "72" would mean 1972.) Unfortunately, many computers and microchips that still use a two-number year will, on January 1, 2000, recognize "00" not as 2000, but as 1900. Without correction, when the computer encoun-

ters the illogical number, it may either shut down or produce unreliable information.

Florida's utilities appear to have made all necessary corrections and thus are ready for the Y2K rollover. Florida's utilities have spent millions of dollars to inventory and repair all software and operational systems that use a date format to ensure that the utilities remain operational. While a remote possibility exists that some scattered outages may occur, it appears these will be few in number and short in duration if they occur at all.

While we don't expect major service disruptions, I would suggest that you make some preparations for Y2K. I do not recommend stockpiling, nor do I recommend doing nothing. For instance you might buy some extra water, some extra food, candles, flashlights and batteries, as you would for a hurricane or any other potential emergency. In fact, many credible sources are saying that a good rule of thumb is to prepare as if you would for a hurricane -- something Floridians are certainly used to and good at.

Another suggestion I have for Y2K is that you recognize that not all problems encountered during the millennium rollover will be due to the millennium bug. A good example is ATMs (automated teller machines). Under normal conditions, at any moment in time, there are numerous ATMs that are out of service. During the millennium rollover period, if you have a problem with your ATM, it isn't advisable to conclude that it is Y2K related. This is because all indications are that the banking industry is more than adequately prepared. Even though it is not necessary to take special action regarding your bank or credit union accounts, keeping accurate and complete records is always a good policy. It is also a good idea, as a precaution, to be aware that ATMs rely on both electricity and the telecommunications network to operate and not to rely

solely on ATMs for your cash needs during the transition.

I have been very active on the state and national levels in researching and dealing with the potential problems associated with Y2K. Florida's PSC staff has contacted numerous groups, including the state's African-American churches and Hispanic communities and the national and state NAACP and National Urban League, to make sure that affected consumers completely understand Y2K. Many of these organizations have access to both the "Y2K and You" information booklet and the "Y2K Preparedness Checklist" from the President's Council on the Year 2000.

If you would like more information on Y2K as it pertains to Florida's public utilities, please contact the PSC at 1-800-342-3552. You may also contact the PSC via e-mail at [contact@psc.state.fl.us](mailto:contact@psc.state.fl.us), or visit our Internet home page at <http://www.floridapsc.com>. We have a section dedicated to Y2K issues.

You may also want to contact the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion at 1-888-USA-4-Y2K (1-888-872-4925). This line offers free information of interest to consumers in common areas such as power, banking, government programs and household products.

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## Y2K TIPS

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- ◆ Be informed and put information into a proper perspective.
- ◆ Seek out trusted institutions and government agencies for updates.
- ◆ Remember that not all technological problems during the rollover will be due to the millennium bug.
- ◆ Have a Happy New Year! Keep a positive outlook, and Y2K should be behind us before you know it.

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*E. Leon Jacobs, Jr. is a Florida Public Service Commissioner. The PSC sets the rates utility companies charge for natural gas, electric and telephone service within the state. In 37 counties, it sets the price you pay for the water you drink, if your water company is privately-owned.*