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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.

**PRESENTATION BY
Mr. John R. McIntire
Associate Chief Information Officer, Los Angeles County
Topic: Status of Y2K Preparation
December 2, 1999**

Mr. McIntire began by saying that, on behalf of Jon Fullinwider, Chief Information Officer (CIO), he wanted to thank the Commission for allowing him to present the contribution of the CIO in addressing the Y2K problem. He continued by giving a brief background on his qualifications.

Mr. McIntire presented a brief history of computer processing and the reasons for the existence of Y2K problems. The primary problem lies in the fact that the date format was originally held to two digits to save on storage space. It is possible that, in some instances, when the year changes to 2000 a system may read it as being 1900. Therein lies the problem. Historically systems have a life expectancy of seven years. But, since it was cheaper to patch than to replace, organizations tended to end up with legacy systems that have outlived their historical live expectancy.

Mr. McIntire told the Commission that today there is an awareness of the same need to consider the technology infrastructures in the same manner as is done with other assets. He feels that the Y2K problem, although requiring a significant effort, has resulted in several benefits.

Mr. McIntire stated that the CIO was confident that there would not be significant problems in Los Angeles County. The problem is more significant than the embedding of a two digit year designator, it is the involvement of the problem within microprocessors that run heating, security, satellite, and many other systems. Many of these systems are difficult, if not impossible, to reach. An example would be a bank vault that has a timer that looks at the day of the week to determine when it will open. The vault may have a processor that uses a date calculation based on Julian algorithms. This algorithm may affect how the transition from 1999 to 2000 is made. Mr. McIntire commented that the problem has expanded world wide, with the cost of remediation estimated to be approximately \$600B. This makes the Y2K effort possibly the biggest single focused undertaking of mankind. Mr. McIntire suggested that litigation costs from Y2K problems could exceed two trillion dollars.

The CIO's office has found it quite difficult to get corporations to provide clear documentation on their Y2K readiness. For a corporation to say categorically that they are not going to experience a problem, may not be in its best risk management interests.

Mr. McIntire remarked that we are living in a global economy, with telecommunications shrinking the world's communication time to nano-seconds. The dependence on technology can potentially create a trickle down affect that will impact Los Angeles County. Thus, it is necessary to look at Y2K not as a regional, but national and international effort. The Board of Supervisors has made it mandatory for each department to be Y2K compliant by September of 1999. The concern is that if provision is not made for the computer infrastructure within the County, the impact would be significant.

It is believed that small businesses are probably the least prepared group to address Y2K problems. If small business is negatively impacted their employees will go to the County for services. This identifies a target population for the CIO. It is imperative to contact these businesses to increase their awareness and to help them determine if they are ready for this transition. Hopefully, this will avoid any inappropriate use of County services while helping small businesses.

Mr. McIntire stated that through public opinion polls and contact made during public speaking events, it has been determined that emergency services, power, water, and public safety are the major Y2K concerns of the public. It is the County's responsibility to insure that these services are not impacted.

Mr. McIntire related that, after the Board of Supervisors established a formal program in 1998, it fell to the CIO to be the Y2K project executive and to manage the County departments in becoming Y2K compliant. Mr. McIntire said that the CIO established a report card system that requires that all departments make formal presentations to the CIO's representatives to determine their Y2K progress. This score card was then published. There was another score card with respect to embedded chips, but this status is much more difficult to determine because it is not tangible. This effort necessitated contacting manufacturers and examining the characteristics of the chips that were used, many of which may have come from several different sub-contractors.

Mr. McIntire said that, although the County government does not have direct control over the municipalities in the County region, the office of the CIO has been successful in holding meetings to assist city managers in complying with Y2K. A survey determined that of the 88 municipalities in Los Angeles County, 80% of the computers were currently Y2K compliant. The remaining 20% have a proactive plan to insure their compliance by the end of December.

As with any system that needs, or may need repair, the first thing is to do an assessment. After an inventory and assessment of all of the County systems, the remediation necessary to insure Y2K compliance could be undertaken. This was one of the hidden benefits of Y2K.

Mr. McIntire noted that the last step in the County's prospective action is to develop contingency plans. It is not enough that all the necessary assessment and remediation be completed, but because of the interdependence and complications of what is being done, a contingency plan is required.

Commissioner Stoke asked what the CIO tells small businesses. Mr. McIntire replied that the Small Business Administration has a pamphlet available that gives step by step instructions for checking out their PC's. They have identified software products that may be affected by Y2K, with instructions for contacting the vendor for a free patch to solve the problem. The pamphlet is almost a hand-holding guide, that clarifies what may and may not be affected. The mission of the CIO is not to solve problems, but rather to make people aware of the circumstances and to point them to resources existing within the community.

Commissioner Padilla wanted to know what Mr. McIntire would suggest for the average consumer with a home computer. Mr. McIntire answered that most major software companies have a web site that offers free patches for their products. He went on to say that a complete backup of all vital documents should be done. For 486 computers and earlier, reset the internal date and time to December 31 at 11:55 and let it rollover to 2000. After this run some programs and see if they will carry the new date.

Mr. McIntire, in summing up, said in excess of 987 critical systems and over 90,000 computer programs in Los Angeles County, have been assessed and brought into Y2K compliance. He added that it was also imperative to ensure that all contingency measures are in place.

Vice Chairman Lucente thanked Mr. McIntire for his presentation and noted the value of this information to the Commission.

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