

Wendland isn't the only one making Y2K preparations



PC
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WENDLAND

A 42-year-old housewife from Troy has been quietly visiting the Costco wholesale store in Madison Heights every other week, buying cases of canned goods and quarts of bottled water.

Several wrote to tell me they thought all this Y2K worry was nonsense.

"I have a pantry filled with food and water," she told me by e-mail. "I have told no one other than our immediate family. But we're ready. By the end of the year, we'll have enough on hand to survive for six months."

A 55-year-old engineer for one of the automobile companies has a vacation home outside of Traverse City. "We have parkas, blankets and freeze-dried food packs already in storage up there. Plus, I'll spend the summer weekends cutting wood and stacking it so it's ready to heat our chalet," he told me. "We plan to drive up after Christmas and see what happens come Jan. 1. If it gets bad, we can stay there and be warm and safe."

Another man, who wouldn't tell me what he does for a living or how old he was, is buying guns.

"I have several shotguns, several .22 rifles and 9mm and .357 handguns," he said. "I'm buying as much ammo as I can. I figure ammo will be as good as cash. I'll keep enough for my own security and barter the rest."

Those are just some of the e-mails I received in the past week after asking for your comments on how you're preparing for Y2K.

Sharing stories

Several wrote to tell me they thought all this Y2K worry was nonsense.

"Quit stoking people's fears," wrote an angry man from Garden City. "Irresponsible stories like yours will cause a panic."

A woman from Ferndale was a little more cordial. "I think it's important to think and study about this," she e-mailed. "But I really don't think Y2K will be that bad. I plan to have some

have lots of candles, batteries for flashlights, some basic supplies. I plan to talk to our doctors and get an extra supply of medicines for the prescriptions we need, too.

Is it really that bad?

To be honest, I find myself going back and forth on this a lot. Some days, like when I read that the railroads are going to be hit really hard and will likely not move trains for some time in some parts of the country, I get really concerned. On other times, when I see that a segment of society like the automotive industry is well on its way to having their systems Y2K compliant, I relax a bit.

But then you get to thinking, what happens if the trains don't deliver coal to the power plants, parts to the suppliers? You see, the real issue is, to quote the old cliché, our entire infrastructure is only as strong as the weakest link. Everything is so interconnected that if one part goes down, there could easily be a snowball effect that takes everything down.

The Army has already been practicing how they can handle food distribution come January, and memos I've seen from the Department of Defense indicate that the military is very concerned about widespread and serious problems. So it's obvious that I'm not being paranoid here.

I think we'll start to get a sense about this when the second quarter financial statements come out in July. We'll start to really see how much Y2K remediation is cutting into the profits of our major corporations. And in the fall, when third quarter statements are released, it will then be very clear, one way or another. If those profit margins slip the way many are predicting, that could have a serious effect on the very volatile market, and if the market tumbles like many are predicting, the whole economy will suffer and everyone will suddenly take notice.

That could bring about all sorts of panic. Also, the end of June is the date most government agencies set as their deadline for fixing their computer

systems. Most agencies were supposed to be ready in January, then February and now June. If we see a lot of spin control and those deadlines are pushed back yet again, the mainstream media will surely take notice and we will enter a whole new stage of awareness on this issue.

The bottom line is, we don't

know how bad it will be.

Maybe, nothing will happen. Maybe. But for now, I'm taking some easy precautions.

I'll let you know between now and the end of the year how my thinking changes.

Mike Wendland covers the Internet for NBC-TV Newschannel stations across the country

and can be seen locally on WDIV-TV4, Detroit. His "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday and Sunday afternoons on WKYC Radio AM1270. His latest book "The Complete No Geek Speak Guide to the Internet" is available in book stores or through his Web site at <http://www.pcmike.com>

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