

New Year's Eve is sometimes a stressful occasion

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Today is New Year's Eve, another opportunity for to mark that an approximately-integral number of revolutions of the earth have occurred since some point in time that wasn't even calculated correctly in the first place. (We retain it for backward compatibility.) December 31, 1999 was a particularly anxious day in the technology sector. Microsoft's Director of Y2K Readiness and vice president of Product Support Services described some of the steps that were being taken to prepare for any timekeeping-related issues that would arise as the calendar ticked over to 2000.

We've analyzed phone capacity, IT systems backup for both data and power, and additional lab environments for enhanced product support capabilities. We have redundant power systems, including back-up generators, at key locations in the unlikely event we lose power.

I got to see one of those key locations, or at least I saw it from a distance. Parked outside Building 26, the home of the Core Operating Systems Division, were semi-trailers filled with computers and back-up generators, ready to spring into action in case of a disaster of biblical proportions and somebody needed to develop a hotfix to Windows on the spot as civilized society collapsed into anarchy all around. (Personally, I would think that if civilization were collapsing, you would have more important things to worry about than patching an operating system.) At least to make things more pleasant for the people who had to remain at work that night, Microsoft threw "a New Year's Eve party with a disc jockey, dinner, and a champagne toast at midnight. Our employees can bring their spouses and children, and we'll even host a separate children's party." Actually, it sounds like they had more fun than I did that night. I think I stayed at home and watched television. It turns out that civilization did not collapse into anarchy. There were minor glitches, but nothing serious. "No problems were seen in Angola, Uganda and Kenya, where the telephone system was said to be functioning as erratically as usual. Italy, one of the worst-prepared countries in the West, also appeared to cross into the new century without any major trouble." Nice to know you can be snarky in a newspaper article. (**Nitpicker's corner:** January 1, 2000 was not the first day of a new century.) Depending on how you look at it, Y2K was either an overhyped event created to generate revenue for the technology industry, or was a demonstration of how people can solve a major problem if they just worked hard and coöperated. Reality is probably a mix of the two.

Happy new year, everybody. See you on the other side.

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