

U.S. Fire Administration / National Fire Academy

*Warning: Hot Coffee!***Topic: A New Y2K Worry?**

Learning objective: The student shall be able to identify potential issues related to embedded computer clocks in fire protection systems and equipment.

This upcoming weekend's time change for congressionally mandated Daylight Saving Time may have unintended consequences in the fire protection industry.

Embedded computer clocks in fire alarm control panels; central processing units; digital communicators; remote annunciators; central, auxiliary, remote, and proprietary monitoring equipment; and other electronic devices may not be programmed correctly to recognize the time changeover at 2 a.m. this Sunday morning (March 11).

While the electronics industry and computer software companies are working hard to write patches for their equipment, stand-alone fire alarm control panels may not get reprogrammed or serviced in time to adjust. Or, like the "Y2K" issue faced at the turn of the last century, it may not be a problem at all. No one is precisely certain or confident of the outcome.

Given the short time span before the time change occurs, inspectors cannot be expected to check all fire alarm systems within their jurisdictions, but should be prepared to deal with potential consequences:

- If a fire alarm control panel or digital communicator transmits a fire alarm, verify that it is correctly "time stamped" for when the incident occurs.
- The supervising station that receives the alarm (central, remote, auxiliary, or proprietary) may have receipt times that differ dramatically from transmission times.
- If you are conducting a postincident investigation, and the alarm times don't correlate correctly, you may want to put a note in the investigation report to explain the anomaly.
- Timed functions associated with fire alarms, such as 24-hour trouble signal reminders, may not report properly.
- Auxiliary functions--such as automatic fire pump starts or door locking/unlocking devices--may not operate as planned.

While this reminder may itself be a "false alarm," one should always be prepared for unintended consequences.

