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PSC FINDS RISK OF Y2K-RELATED UTILITY OUTAGES IS LOW

Montana utilities do not expect outages of natural gas, electricity or telephone services to occur January 1 as a result of the Year 2000 computer problem, according to a report by the state Public Service Commission. The Y2K problem arises when computer systems or embedded data-sensitive chips that identify calendar years only by the last two digits are not able to distinguish between the years 2000 and 1900.

Based on information the PSC has been collecting from regulated utilities since August 1998, it appears that they have adequately prepared to avoid any problems that might be caused by the Y2K problem. If there are any utility service outages as a result of the change to the next millennium, the problems likely will be geographically scattered and of short duration.

The PSC noted it has no knowledge or control over the Y2K preparedness of unregulated utilities such as rural electric and telephone cooperatives, cellular companies and cable TV providers.

The PSC offers the following Y2K advice:

- Don't check your phone to see if it's working at midnight on New Year's Eve. If everyone does that at the same time, it could overload the telephone system.
- Don't call 911 unless you have a real emergency.
- Have the same items on hand as you would have in preparation for a typical winter storm: batteries, flashlights, one gallon of water per day per person and three days' worth of food.

Lots of Y2K information and advice is available on the Internet. Some good websites are:

www.state.mt.us/isd/year2000

www.y2k.gov

www.mtpower.com/about/year2000

www.wsc.com/y2k

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