

---

# Examples of Information System Hazards

Richard Baskerville  
Georgia State University

---

---

# Everybody Wins!

---



## News Item

A computer glitch resulted in a printing error in a batch of bottle caps. This resulted in 500,000 Pepsi promotional contest winners across the U.S.

---

# Who Needs A Parole Board?



## News Item

A five-minute power outage caused the complete failure of the newly installed software in the county jail in Oklahoma County, Colorado. Some jail doors were released open and unlockable, while some others were stubbornly locked and could not be released. There was no manual override.

# My Late Valentine



## News Item

In 1993, it was discovered that automatic mail sorting readers in the Canadian post office were only reliable with high-contrast input, such as black ink on white paper. In particular, problems developed reading red envelopes resulting in delays for many valentine letters.

# Computer Kills All in Hartford



## News Item

There was a three-year period in which Hartford, Connecticut residents were excluded from jury selection. This was traced to a character field overflow condition in which the "d" at the end of Hartford became the first character in the next field. The jury selection program treated all residents of Hartford in category "d", "deceased".

# "U" Short Enough?



## News Item

The New York state college record system routinely mis-represented one community college name because of field truncation. In 1992 the college gave up in exasperation and spent \$50,000 to change its name so that it would fit in the state computer records.

---

# His Grace's Cage

---



News Item

A Catholic primate in Canada received a questionnaire from the Primate Research Institute.

---

# On The Nose of The Dead Dog



## News Item

To the joy of New Zealand greyhound racetrack betting fans, bets on Waikato races were accepted after the race was over. The races were being delayed by a half-hour but the operators had entered the delay as one-hour. The operators were confused by the resulting "override for early close" message during the fast-paced action that accompanies each typically 20-second race. (Notably, 139 people bet on dogs that had already lost.)

# Good Morning Briton!



## News Item

A British Telecom test computer began routinely waking one poor woman each morning with a mysterious telephone call around 4:30 am. British telecom monitored the woman's telephone line for months attempting to trace the "culprit." The problem was indeed due to a programming error in the test computer.

# Nappies?



## News Item

A Minnesota computer mistakenly invited a 104-year-old woman to attend kindergarten. The computer program invited children born in the year "88." The woman was born in 1888.

# Stay in Bed on New Year's



## News Item

New Zealand has been called "the king's taster for clock problems" because a new date hits New Zealand first. On December 31, 1992 several thousand bank ATM customers had their transactions rejected and their bank cards corrupted by a "faulty date checking routine." Apparently the leap year was one day too long for the banking software and the ATM machines.

# Left Turn Only



## News Item

A new traffic computer in Hawaii had been programmed on the mainland to respond to the daylight savings time. The computer automatically adjusted for the time change even though Hawaii doesn't observe daylight savings. Morning traffic jams resulted.

# Inflationary Fix



## News Item

A former California Department of Motor Vehicles employee used her legitimate access to DMV computer systems and changed motor vehicle license data (such as traffic violations) for fees between \$400 and \$500 per transaction. "Fronting" her was an insurance agent who charged up to \$2500 for each transaction.

# Rocket Bomb



## News Item

A former General Dynamics computer programmer planted a "logic bomb" in an Atlas Rocket hoping that the company will hire him back to solve the problem. He was arrested and pled guilty.

# This Guy ALWAYS Wins?



## News Item

A U.S. hacker was charged with phone and computer fraud after allegedly tapping into the Pacific Bell telephone network where they could commandeer phone lines in order to rig a radio contest. The loot included two Porsches, \$20,000 in cash and two trips to Hawaii. The charges also included eavesdropping on an ex-girlfriend, Pacific Bell investigators and the FBI.

# Predictable Parking



## News Item

An Iowa theft ring (made up of youths) hacked into Iowa Department of Transportation computer system to determine the likely parking area of the cars likely to have valuable radios and accessories. They would then locate the cars and steal the radios.

---

# His Honor's Prerogative

---



## News Item

The mayor of the City of Colorado used his system authority to regularly read the email of fellow council members.

---

# A Four Letter Word Meaning...



## News Item

On several occasions, an unknown hacker broke into an Italian newspaper computer used by the editorial staff to prepare copy for publication. Advertisements, crossword puzzles and horoscopes were altered into obscene, offensive phrases. Some changes were caught, others were published.