

Abstracts of Recent Articles and Literature

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Powerful virus hits computers, *Dean Takahashi*. The Worm.Explore.Zip virus spreads via E-mail from one friend to another. It sends a message in response to an E-mail using the same subject line as the one originally sent. The reply message carries with it a copy of the virus in an attachment. If the attachment is opened, the 'payload' of the virus is activated, which results in the deletion of most files from the computer including all document, Power Point and spreadsheet files. The virus can leave the computer inoperable. The impact of the virus could be limited as people have learned not to open strange attachments, but the results could be devastating for those who do fall victim to it, which accentuates the importance of a regular back-up. Officials at the anti-virus company Network Associates Inc. estimated that 70% of its top 500 customers were hit with varying amounts of damage. The US Federal Bureau of Investigation has begun a criminal investigation into the matter. *The Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 1999.

Data protection dispute exposes core differences, *Emma Tucker*. The European Union's new data protection directive has caused a transatlantic dispute. The commotion has exposed core cultural differences between the US and the EU over the extent to which personal information should be protected, and could lead to a block in data flows between the two. When member states have implemented the directive, countries will be able to stop personal data from travelling to non-EU countries that do not provide enough protection. Because the US has a more relaxed approach to data protection, US companies that have an interest in

Europe may find that they are not allowed to repatriate personal records, information on purchasing practices, or client details. This could be a serious problem owing to the growth in E-commerce. The US has proposed a self-regulatory plan to which companies would be invited to sign up. The plan would involve voluntary 'safe harbours' that would commit them to a set of data protection principles, but industry is concerned that this may cause costly and cumbersome legislation. Although the EU says it can agree to self-regulation, it has yet to accept the safe harbours. The deadline for sorting out the dispute has elapsed. *Financial Times*, June 9, 1999.

Developing countries 'face Y2K trade problems', *Frances Williams*. The United Nations has warned that many developing countries face severe disruption in trade and loss of vital tariff revenues after December 31 this year because their computerized customs systems cannot cope with the Y2K problem. In many of these nations, customs duties provide as much as half of total government revenues. Approximately 75 developing countries are using the Automated System for Customs Data and Management (Asycuda) from the UN Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad). This has enabled them to speed up processing shipments, raise tariff revenues and reduce corruption, and provide trade statistics for policymakers. Unctad has identified that almost 40 of these countries have a high risk of succumbing to the Millennium Bug. Although Unctad has offered countries 'millennium-compliant' software free of charge, many had not taken up the offer, owing to the low level of awareness about the Y2K problem. The cost is estimated at \$11 million to fund procurement of new