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Attorneys and judges prep for G8, NATO summits

BY PAT MILHIZER
Law Bulletin staff writer

The way Mitchell D. Weinstein sees it, preparing for the G8 and NATO summits is 1999 all over again. Nobody really knows how daily life will be affected.

"What type of readiness do we need to have in place? Nobody knew what it was with Y2K," said Weinstein, an attorney at Chuhak & Tecson P.C. "Will the computers explode? Die? Just have a glitch?"

Of course, no computers exploded when 2000 began without much of a disruptive bang.

But just as businesses prepared in 1999, Chuhak & Tecson prepares for the summits. The firm formed a subcommittee of two lawyers and the chief operating officer to explore how to operate when the summits come to town.

Leaders from around the world — and hundreds of news reporters and protesters — will visit Chicago for two two-day summits at McCormick Place that overlap each other from May 19 to 21. The first two days fall on a weekend and crowds are expected in the weekdays preceding the events.

Last month, downtown business leaders started asking questions and talking about closing for a day or more to prepare for the swarm of people. It's not clear how, or if, the summits will affect traffic,

public transportation and travel times between downtown and the city's two airports.

"We've explored a couple alternatives of should we have an alternative location for a few days — literally, man a suburban office or somewhere outside the Loop," Weinstein said. "I don't think it's going to happen. I think that's cost prohibitive, but we're looking at it."

Lawyers are still waiting to find out if the Daley Center will close on any days.

In the Cook County Circuit Court Law Division, which hosts high-stakes injury and death cases, judges are not scheduling jury trials for May 21 and the week leading up to the summits.

"We're trying to make sure that the jurors are not in jeopardy coming down here," said Circuit Judge William D. Maddux, presiding judge of the Law Division.

The Illinois State Bar Association also will not schedule any Continuing Legal Education courses and committee or section council meetings from May 17 to 22.

"It's really just the anticipated large number of people who are going to be in the downtown area," said ISBA spokesman Dave Anderson. "The inconvenience of trying to get around, if that's the case, the security precautions that we know the city and others are



Mitchell D. Weinstein

taking that would make it more difficult to hold timely meetings."

The Chicago G8 and NATO Host Committee — which coordinates the summits with local, state and federal authorities — tells people that the city "is open for business," said committee spokeswoman Jennifer Martinez.

"We're working closely with our federal law enforcement partners and the Chicago Police Department to make sure there's as minimal impact to residents as possible," Martinez said.

The Secret Service expects to release a plan about two to four weeks before the events on how

the summits will affect transportation and streets, Martinez said. Anybody can sign up for city-related news alerts at notifychicago.org.

About 2,500 to 3,000 journalists will attend the summits, Martinez said.

"Having these summits is an opportunity for us to highlight Chicago to the world," she said.

At Chuhak & Tecson, the firm employs about 65 lawyers and 75 staff members. About 25 employees can access the firm's computer system from outside the office at one time and the firm will decide whether to add software licenses so more attorneys can work out of the office at one time.

The firm told lawyers not to schedule office meetings with clients or others on May 18 and May 21.

"Not because we expect anything," Weinstein said, "but we don't want a last-minute situation where a client can't get here or safetywise, it doesn't make sense to get here."

As of now, the firm hasn't decided if it will close. Weinstein said the subcommittee is "trying to be sensitive that we don't want all our attorneys working from home, but then the staff has to come in."

"This is one of those fluid situations," Weinstein said, "that we're just developing different possibilities."