

What if the economy melts down?

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Without a successful government rescue, experts say these worst-case scenarios could ensue

Your employer may not be able to make payroll because the company's bank account could be frozen in a bank failure.

Your credit card could be rejected when you try to pay for groceries or gasoline.

Your bank might close.

Why the dire consequences? Broadly, mortgage securities have lost their value because of bad loans, and banks now are afraid to lend to businesses and banks aren't even lending to other banks - an essential element to providing the economy with liquidity.

The Bush administration hopes that by stepping in to buy up toxic mortgage securities, banks will stabilize and resume normal lending.

If they don't?

'The failure of one institution could lead to a chain reaction,' said Krishnan Dandapani, a Florida International University finance professor. 'It would be alm