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Will the Daylight Savings Shift Do Us Any Good?

By NED POTTER

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Daylight Saving Might Not Save Energy

March 9, 2007 — -- Next week, by congressional mandate, you will probably stumble out of bed an hour early -- possibly, depending on your schedule, before dawn.

It's all in the name of saving energy. At least, that's what we were told.

Congress made daylight-saving time three weeks earlier this year. Proponents argued that the shift would reduce America's energy consumption during that period about 1 percent.

Will it work? Not very likely, say two young economists at the University of California at Berkeley.

More Evening Sun -- but Less in the Morning

Congress's logic was simple. If there's an extra hour of sunlight in the evening, people will turn on fewer lights. The Transportation Department once did a study saying daylight savings reduced America's use of oil by 100,000 barrels a day.

But Ryan Kellogg and Hendrik Wolff, who are working on their doctorates in economics, say the reduced need for light in the evening will likely be negated by the increased need in the early morning.

The folks in Washington apparently hadn't considered this. The daylight savings shift was a three-paragraph item in a 550-page energy bill in 2005. And that study from the Transportation Department? It's more than 30

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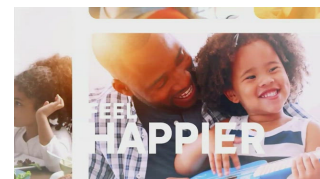
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years old.

Kellogg and Wolff came to their conclusion by studying Australia, where several states extended daylight-saving time (DST for short) by two months in 2000 to accommodate the Olympic Games in Sydney that year.

They compared electric demand in the state of Victoria, which extended DST, with its next-door neighbor, South Australia, which did not.

"Our results show that the extension failed to conserve electricity," they wrote.

"If it's dark enough in the morning that pretty much everyone has to turn on the lights," said co-author Kellogg, "what that means is that that increase in morning electricity consumption is going to be so big that it offsets any benefits we get from the extra light in the evening."

In fact, the two said, shifting Australians' clocks led to a tiny *increase* in power use.

"The response I've been getting when talking to people is, 'Well, why are we doing this if this doesn't save any energy?'" said Kellogg.

What Does It Mean for You?

Australia, of course, is not America, but the two researchers say their study is not a good sign. "While we cannot directly apply our results to other countries without adjustment for behavioral and climatic differences, this study raises concern that the U.S. is unlikely to see the anticipated energy conservation benefits from extending DST."

The Department of Energy is mindful of this. It has told the two Berkeley researchers it will respond to their study in coming weeks.

In the 2005 energy bill, Congress calls on the department to report whether energy consumption drops, as hoped, after the early start of DST. If not, the bill has a provision for the country to return to the old daylight savings calendar. Under the previous law, standardized in 1986, DST began on the first Sunday in April.

In the meantime, consumers and information-technology specialists are girding for the myriad hiccups that could happen because many computers, digital networks, hand-helds and other devices with clocks built in need to be updated. While no major disruptions are expected, one analyst estimated to ABC News that American companies were spending \$2 billion checking and updating all those devices.

Will it pay off? Analysts say we won't know for sure until after the experiment is over.

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