

Technology

Is anyone sure what time it is in the United States?

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It's been made much harder by the imposition of Daylight Savings Time (DST) three weeks earlier than normal - an idea the US Congress voted for two years ago, hoping that getting everyone out of bed an hour earlier would lead to energy savings of 1%. That could save millions of barrels of oil if brighter evenings mean fewer lights turned on.

The only problems with the scheme are the amount of Y2K-style updating it has imposed on software companies trying to make sure they've implemented the new DST correctly, and some postgraduate analysis which suggests that the change won't help because people getting up earlier will use more energy.

The software problems have mostly focused on Microsoft's Outlook calendaring application and PCs' inbuilt clocks. Microsoft didn't offer a downloadable patch, leading to problems, such as that at the Drug Abuse Comprehensive Coordinating office in Tampa, Florida: "We had four different times on the PCs! Some [PCs] were on time, some were one hour behind, some were one hour ahead and some were two hours ahead," its network administrator told Microsoft Watch. Certainly, it's the perfect excuse for missing the dentist.

But Ryan Kellogg and Hendrik Wolff at the University of California in Berkeley examined the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, where some states implemented a two-hour extended DST move while the state of South Australia didn't. The result? Extended DST states used slightly more energy because early risers turned on lights when they got up.

The US Department of Energy says it will respond to Kellogg and Hendrik in a couple of weeks. Don't set your watch by it, though.

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