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Will Daylight Time Mean Energy Savings?

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Sure, you've almost finished uploading all those software patches to assure that your computer, digital video recorder, and cellphone successfully sync up with this year's early daylight savings time, which starts March 11. But are you prepared for colder, darker March mornings?

New research is raising questions whether any energy savings will result from the daylight savings shift—and the determining factor will be how the nation's households react to springing ahead earlier.

Congress mandated an extension of daylight savings time as part of the big 2005 energy bill, and this week, the cosponsors of the measure, Massachusetts Democrat Edward Markey and Michigan Republican Fred Upton, released new data they say demonstrate the benefits over the long run. They say an American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy [analysis](#) predicts the change will save consumers \$4.4 billion and eliminate the need for three coal plants by the year 2020.

No savings?

But a [recent analysis](#) by the California Energy Commission concluded that the early daylight savings time change more likely will shift electricity use to off-peak hours rather than result in a large drop in power use. Electricity use could decline 0.5 percent, "but the savings could just as well be zero," the report said. A shift to off-peak electricity use does have benefits—lowering the capacity requirements for utilities—but probably less than congressional advocates advertise.

The real-world example that raises doubts is Victoria, Australia's extension of daylight savings time for hours during the 2000 Olympics. An [analysis](#) released several weeks ago by University of California–Berkeley economists shows that reduced energy use in the evening hours was entirely negated by the new morning spike in power consumption as households in the Australian state lit up their homes and tried to keep warm while preparing for work.

Congress based its decision on studies dating back to the 1970s. During the Arab oil embargo, an extended daylight savings time was tried as an energy-saving measure, but the farm industry

balked because it reduced productivity in the important early hours. However, the farm industry did not oppose the measure this time, since automation has resolved many of the problems that loomed large for agriculture 30 years ago.

Airlines' reservations

Only one industry logged significant opposition to the new daylight savings time measure—the U.S. airlines. They argued that the change would be costly and put them at a competitive disadvantage because of the tight allocation of take-off and landing time-slots at big overseas hubs like Heathrow Airport.

Although the airline industry warned of potential scheduling difficulties for passengers when fighting the bill two years ago, David Castelveter, spokesman for the Air Transport Association, says that industry has worked to resolve any issues.

He predicts little impact on travelers but said the change required significant resources and time for the industry. "What is yet to be seen is the financial impact on the carriers, because it diverted attention away from their core business," he says.

However, small businesses are more likely to be affected by the change than big businesses like airlines, says Dave Thewlis, executive director of Calconnect, a partnership of vendors and customers of calendar and scheduling systems. That's simply because small businesses don't have the dedicated tech staff to keep track of all the computer systems that need adjusting because of the time change.

His group has put together [a website](#) with advisories and links from software companies directing users to the necessary software upgrades and patches. "My take is that there are going to be widespread problems," says Thewlis, "but they are probably going to be relatively few significant problems, as opposed to [irritations](#) and missed meetings."