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Early time change could throw your computer

But impact of March 11 switch to daylight-saving time is not really known

By [BILL HUSTED](#)

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If you wake up feeling out of sorts this coming Sunday because of the start of daylight-saving time, you won't be alone. Computers systems around the country may be cranky, too.

Computers and their human masters will be dealing with this year's early start of daylight-saving time. The date was advanced to March 11 from the traditional April 1 as part of an energy saving measure adopted in the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The idea is, more daylight means less electricity use.

But the early time change conflicts with computers and gadgets programmed to adjust under the old calendar.

Left as is, that could affect everything from airline schedules to digital appointment calendars. Your programmable thermostats could turn up the heat an hour early, and VCRs or digital video recorders may be off an hour too.

Businesses have been scrambling to update software and most, including metro Atlanta companies, say that's been done successfully. And home computers with the latest versions of Windows and the Apple operating system won't need to do a thing because of automatic updates.

"Our sense is that it is a problem that will be very wide and not very deep," said Steve Ostrowski of the Computing Technology Industry Association. "Instead of a disaster we are talking about a possible aggravation."

There's always the chance of the type of computerized havoc predicted — but not seen — for the Year 2000 computer glitch. Most computer professionals think that's unlikely. They say the industry has had plenty of time to prepare and most software will change time on the new schedule.

Still, "I think it's a fair statement to say we won't really know how serious it is until it's over," Ostrowski said.

That's how it was with Y2K. Some experts predicted disasters that included utilities shutting down, airplanes crashing and even errant missile launches. But most computers chugged into the new century without incident.

Jonathon Giffin, an assistant professor at Georgia Tech's School of Computer Science, thinks daylight-saving time problems will be minor.

"Best case it's not an issue, people and businesses will have updated the systems and they just roll over to the new time," he said. "Worst case, even then, the fears are just not as dire as Y2K. Maybe, for a couple of weeks some clocks may be off for an hour and it may have an impact on payroll systems for people who are clocking in and clocking out."

For most businesses, the impact has been in advance. Fixing the problem has caused varying degrees of hassle for computer departments. No industry-wide cost figures are available, but no one thinks it comes close to the billions spent preparing for the Year 2000.

Preparing for the time change at Home Depot "has a huge impact on our operations," said spokesman Tony Wilbert. He said the company's information technology department has worked day and night to update computers in the chain's 2,000 stores, as well as 160,000 desktop and laptop computers and 5,500 BlackBerry devices.

"We are more than 95 percent complete, and are confident the rest will be ready by March 11," Wilbert said.

Coca-Cola spokesman Dana Bolden said the company's technology vendors have assured the beverage giant that the proper fixes are in place.

However, Coke warned executives to be careful when setting appointments. While software updates have been made to Coke's Microsoft Windows application and BlackBerry handhelds, appointments already made won't automatically be updated, according to a memo from Coke's chief technology officer that was provided by the company.

At UPS, spokesman Norman Black said the Sandy Springs-based delivery giant doesn't rely on the time settings on customers' computers. And UPS' own systems have been prepped to avoid problems, Black said.

"It was not a costly endeavor at all," he said.


Delta Air Lines put a special team to work on its computer system and "they are testing the computer software codes and making sure that all the computer systems have the necessary software fixes," said spokeswoman Gina Laughlin. She emphasized that no safety issues were involved.

Many home computer users won't have to do a thing — automatic updates from Microsoft and Apple have already addressed the problem. To be safe, experts say to check Web sites to see what, if anything, you should do.

As for your programmable thermostat, you're on your own. Those sorts of devices will have to be reset manually.

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