

Daylight savings times changes threaten IT disruption

by Paul Weinberg

IT administrators are better prepared than their counterparts in charge of mission critical facilities infrastructure to handle some form of disruption that is expected with recent legislative changes to Daylight Savings Time (DST).

"IT people are very aware of it. Certainly, it is a concern for them; but IT people and facilities people sometimes do not work very closely. In some companies they do and in others they do not," stated Bob Woolley, director of technical quality management for Lee Technologies, a provider of disaster mitigation solutions,

In facilities management, he is referring to systems wrapped around the data center, including cooling and heating, uninterrupted power, building management, security and fire emergency alarms.

Starting in March 2007, daylight savings time in the United States will begin on the second Sunday in March and end on the first Sunday in November. Previously, daylight savings time began in the United States on the first Sunday in April and ended on the last Sunday in October.

All of the United States, with the exception of Arizona, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and American Samoa are affected by the legislative changes to DST

Woolley urged facility, data center and IT managers to closely examine their equipment to determine what requires immediate attention and then embark upon a plan for a smooth transition when the time change takes effect in the U.S. on March 11, 2007.

Facilities managers appear to be less worried about the switch in Daylight Savings Time, he has observed.

But this is a mistaken attitude, Woolley indicated. "The impact of an issue on the facilities side of the house is not quite as great as it would be on the IT side; nevertheless these kinds of environments go on a mitigated risk."

Many systems with automatic and programmed Daylight Savings Times may require manual changes.

Those areas affected by the time change include scheduled automated processes such as timestamps, login times, building access control, and events performed out of sequence, he noted.

Woolley pointed to proprietary systems that require a firmware update from the manufacturer for fire panels, automatic transfer switches, uninterrupted power supplies and generator control systems.

"If facility systems were to lose synchronization with the new time standard, there could be a period of one to three weeks, twice a year, where they would be out of sync with the actual time of day."

Security systems that control access to commercial or manufacturing premises at specific times of the day would be especially vulnerable to the time changes, he suggested.

Woolley stressed though that he wants to avoid the hype that surrounded making IT systems compliant for the 21st Century -- since most of us well remember the Y2K hoopla over ominous threats that never happened.

"We don't want to make a big deal out of [DST]. We want to raise awareness and whatever problems that can be mitigated, beforehand."



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He stated that his industry has learned the lesson of how to avoid exaggerated alarms of a potential problem.

"There are concerns you need to address but you do not need to go off the deep end about it. You just find out what needs to be adjusted."

Nonetheless, Wooley stated he anticipates actual outages to occur in mission critical facilities. To mitigate these facilities managers will have to install a software patch and in some cases a firmware update.

"If it is legacy equipment there may not be a solution. People are going to have to cope with it when it occurs."



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