



Daylight Saving and Road Safety: Are we winding the danger forward too?

This Sunday, people in some Australian states will be winding the clocks forward an hour. But is the time the only thing that changes?

Sydneysiders out in the morning during September know first light is not long after 5am along the coast. Next week, some commuters will be reaching for the headlights. This begs the question: does the start of daylight saving bring additional danger for road users? A current study suggests the answer is yes.

In a recent blog, Owner Operator Direct, a US insurance company specialising in heavy vehicles, wrote about 2020 study by University of Colorado Boulder. It found the risk of fatal crashes increases by 6% in the workweek following the start of daylight saving in the US.

Also, the farther west a person lives within their time zone, the higher the risk of a fatal crash. In those places, risk rises by 8%. To put that into perspective, in Australia, the sun comes up 20 minutes later in Melbourne than it does in Sydney. In western Victoria, the sun can rise 45 minutes later than in Sydney. Does daylight saving present a greater risk on our regional roads where the majority of fatal crashes occur? Motorists in regional Australia are warned about animals being active at dawn and dusk. Would the risk of a collision with wildlife also increase?

The US study looked at fatal crash data from 1996 to 2017 in parts of the country that observe daylight saving. The spike was consistent for the whole period. Even in 2007, when the US moved the start of daylight saving from April to March, researchers found the spike in crashes moved in line with that change.

The change in visibility in the early hours of the day, and the disruption to the internal body clock are cited as reasons for the increased crash risk.

However, a 2018 study in the UK found a slight fall in crashes of 1.5% in the fortnight following the start of summer time and it was at the end of daylight saving when collisions spiked. There is also an argument in the UK that daylight saving should be year-round. Reasoning that it is safer to drive in daylight, an extra hour of sun during the PM peak could reduce serious crashes during those times.

While we wait for a PhD candidate to give us a definitive answer on daylight saving and road safety, try to get to bed a bit earlier and not miss out on sleep - shift workers will tell you how important good sleep patterns are. Finally, adjust your speed and following distance for the low light environment and if you're in the bush, keep scanning the roadside – the kangaroos mightn't have adjusted their pocket watches.



Image: The shadows are long early in the day

References: <https://www.owneroperatordirect.com/blog/spring-ahead-consequences>

<https://www.aami.com.au/aami-informed/on-the-road/safe-driving/aami-reveals-peak-periods-for-animal-collisions.html>

https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/DST_Collisions-2012-2017_REPORT_Oct-2018.pdf

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RTS Zero is the partnership of Michael Timms and Sonia Roberts who have a combined 55 years of experience in road safety. Their profiles are searchable on LinkedIn. This work is their personal analysis of current events.