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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Nation Ticked Off After a Winter of Summer Time

By Olga Kalashnikova

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Workers complain that the clock debacle has made it harder to wake up. **Igor Tabakov**

ST. PETERSBURG — The famous proverb, "Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise," was penned by American founding father Benjamin Franklin. He was also the first to suggest implementing daylight-saving time.

But as Russia reaches the end of its first winter spent on summertime — after the controversial decision to stop changing the clocks — many complain that they feel anything but healthy.

"It's like torture," said Pavel Kondratiyev, a computer specialist. "Being on summertime in the winter is a big problem for me."

"I'm kind of light dependent. I always need light. It's so difficult to get up in the dark every morning," he said. "Moreover, my office doesn't have any windows, so I'm in the dark all day:

I go to work and it's dark, I go back home and it's even darker."

In February last year, when President Dmitry Medvedev announced the decision not to change the clocks, 73 percent of Russians approved, state-run pollster VTsIOM found, while only 6 percent disagreed.

"Moving the clocks forward and back every spring and autumn, everyone swears that the human biorhythm is really disturbed," Medvedev said at the time. "I think [not changing the clocks] will be of interest to our country and rather helpful," he said.

However, since the law has come into force, public opinion has changed dramatically.

More than half of those polled (52 percent) do not see the reform as logical, according to a poll carried out by the HeadHunter recruitment agency for RIA-Novosti. Forty-six percent of employees believe that the long hours of darkness in the morning — a result of not changing the clocks — has had a negative effect on their work.

Almost one in every five employees feels sluggish and drowsy and cannot concentrate on the work they need to do. And 15 percent started being late more often, and 18 percent cannot make themselves work at all, HeadHunter found.

The lack of light in the morning takes the heaviest toll on academic workers and marketing and human resources specialists, the agency discovered, while those who work in extracting raw materials or in the production sphere have not noticed any negative changes in their work.

Those with small children have also been affected, psychologists say.

"These people have to deal with their own reaction and adapt to the reaction of children whose usual routine has been upset," psychologist Natalya Meleshkova said.

Schoolchildren, however, have benefitted from the constant summer time.

"In winter, the sun rises in our city late," she said. "Therefore, it doesn't matter how we change the time because people who work and study have to wake up and leave home in the dark regardless. Since it gets light and dark an hour later, children see more daylight. Now pupils come back home while it's still light out."

For most employees, the reasons cited as preventing them from working as usual are difficulties waking up in the morning, the constant wish to sleep and depression and a bad mood caused by the morning darkness.

"The absence of daylight leads to depression, apathy, sluggishness and laziness," Meleshkova said. "This seasonal depression, however, also serves as a protective function to prevent the organism from overworking and helps to conserve energy under difficult natural conditions."

Specialists from the Ancor recruitment agency, on the other hand, have not found serious changes in people's work activity. Reports that companies have resorted to planning important meetings for later in the day as a result of employees' struggle to get used to the

time difference are untrue, the agency said.

"Recently we have been scheduling meetings for 8:30 or 9 a.m. This doesn't have anything to do with the season or clocks changing, it depends on people's work schedule and employee motivation," said Natalya Schegoleva, head of Ancor in St. Petersburg.

Most employees hope to get used to the new regime in the next one or two years, while 20 percent of those polled believe that they will never adapt to it, HeadHunter found. Psychologists, however, see benefits in keeping the existing regime.

"People maintain their usual regime when it comes to sleeping and eating," Meleshkova said. "In previous years [when the clocks were changed], they had difficulties when they were already hungry and it wasn't dinnertime yet, or they got tired in the evening, but it was too early to go to bed."

"When the time remains stable, people regard the change in light due to the season as more mild and gradual," she said.

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has said on more than one occasion that he may reconsider the decision. On Tuesday, he told supporters that if people felt strongly that the change was a mistake, the government may turn back the clock on the move.

Last month, he told football fans that perhaps the decision wasn't thought through completely.

Putin added that he always finds it difficult to get up in the morning.

The practice of temporarily advancing the clock to conserve electricity in the evening has been widely used around the world since 1916, when it was first tried by Germany. In Russia, the practice was only introduced in 1981.

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