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 Editor: Bill Hardy  
 2301 Pacific Ave.  
 Aberdeen, WA, 98520  
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## Special Features

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 "MISTAKE" DXing. Alert DXers can often get rare catches by tuning around at sunrise and sunset to watch for stations coming on too early or staying on too late with daytime facilities.

I was reminded of this on 10/1/78 when one of my locals stayed on 40 to 50 minutes past sunset, when the DJ forgot that sunset in October was an hour earlier than it had been for that station in September, the day before.

With DST ending on 10/29/78, this might be a good time to remind oldtime DXers about this aspect of DXing, and also tell newer DXers about it.

Many of you know that sunrise and sunset times for AM broadcast stations in the U.S. are based on sunrise and sunset on the 15th day of each month, rounded off to the nearest 15 minutes, and used for the entire month. The FCC computes this time for each station, and lists the times in each AM station's license. The popular "Sunrise-Sunset Maps" for the 12 months of the year, sold through the IRCA Goodie Factory, are based on these FCC calculations.

Generally, stations stick to the sunrise/sunset times in their licenses. Daytimers are usually accurate within a minute, and fulltimers that have power and/or pattern changes from daytime to nighttime are usually fairly close to the licensed times. But, during the first few days of a new month, and especially when Daylight Saving Time (DST) begins and ends, some stations make mistakes.

Basically, mistakes can be caused by traffic errors or deejay errors. Traffic errors occur when the station's Traffic Department (the people who prepare and type the program logs) forget to change the time for "Power Increase," "Pattern Change," "Sign-Off," etc. on the log. These errors happen usually only on the first day or two of the month, and are sometimes caught by the deejay on duty but occasionally slip through.

Even when the log is typed correctly by the Traffic Department, the deejay may make a mistake. He may be used to "Power Increase," "Pattern Change," "Sign-Off," etc. being at a certain time during his deejay shift, and when it suddenly pops up at a different time he may overlook it. Since different people often fill in as weekend deejays, and these weekend people are often less experienced, they also have an opportunity to make mistakes on their own Saturday or Sunday shifts.

Actually, it makes no difference to the DXer whether the mistake was on the log or caused by the deejay, because the result is still the same - the station may start using its daytime facilities (day power and pattern) earlier than it should, or later than it should. Or it may sign off (if it's a daytimer) or switch to night power/pattern too early or too late. Note that this sometimes works in your favor: If one of your pests signs on too late or signs off too early, it opens up the frequency to sunrise/sunset skip catches you wouldn't otherwise hear.

Most likely to make the mistakes during the first few days of a month are the fulltime stations. Also in this category are daytime AM stations that simulcast a fulltime FM station, where "AM Sign-Off" is done at a different time each month but otherwise the station's programming is unchanged. The staff at most daytime AM-only stations is usually very aware of the changing sign-off times each month, although a new employee in the Traffic Department or on the weekends could cause a little havoc.

One source of errors could be sign-on during the spring and summer. In many parts of the U.S., local sunrise is 6am or earlier starting in March or April. This means that stations with a fixed 6am sign-on (daytimers with pre-sunrise authority, plus fulltimers signing on at 6am) will start signing on with full daytime facilities at 6am. In August or September, when sunrise is once again later than 6am, the morning deejay may be in the habit of signing on with full daytime power, and accidentally begin August or September (as the case may be) with full power at 6am when he should be using nighttime or presunrise power. Naturally, this station will get out better than it would if it were using the more restrictive nighttime or presunrise facilities.

The beginning and ending of DST also can cause a good number of blunders. For one thing, there's inevitably someone who forgets to change his clock, so he shows up an hour late on the last Sunday in April and signs on late. Or, if he shows up and the studio clock is still on Standard Time, he might do the power increase or whatever an hour late! The odds are, however, that somebody would set the poor guy straight before sign-off time. But suppose that the Traffic Department forgot about DST and left everything on the log in Standard Time. Then, the station might start using daytime facilities at 5:30am DST rather than 5:30am Standard Time! Likewise, it could sign off or go to night facilities at 7:00pm DST rather than 7:00pm Standard Time! Since many American stations are using full power before 6am Standard Time in April, but in many cases sunrise will revert to just past 6am DST for the final one-to-seven days of April, this could be interesting!

Mistakes at the end of DST, on the last Sunday in October, will be even more noticeable, because the DX season is in full swing by then and skip conditions in late October are much better than in late April. Imagine everything we just mentioned, except in reverse order. The sign-on man on the last Sunday of October might show up an hour early for work. If the studio clock has been changed, he'll just be mad. But if the studio clock has not been changed, he might sign on an hour too early and/or switch to daytime facilities an hour early! Or, if the log is done in DST by mistake, the sign-off time might be listed an hour too late. More than once, I have heard a station listed for a 6:30pm DST sign-off in October staying on the air till 6:30pm Standard Time on the last Sunday in October - putting them on the air a full hour past legal sunset and maybe 1½ or 1¾ hours past real sunset, because it's late in the month - it's almost as good as a DX Test!

In practice, fewer than 1% of America's AM stations will actually make such serious mistakes on the day DST begins or ends, or at the beginning of any given month. But the opportunities are there, so if you can try a little sunrise/sunset DXing at those times, be alert for signals you don't usually hear at that hour. It just might be your most-wanted station, making a mistake!

--Bill Hardy, 2301 Pacific Ave., Aberdeen, WA, 98520