



DARK SKIES

by Bernadell Larson, HCMG

Ever want to sit outside in your garden and gaze at the stars, the Milky Way and other galaxies, watch shooting stars, or satellites on the horizon?

People are losing the option because we are losing the darkness in our night sky. The problem is more pronounced in urban areas, but as more of us baby boomers are moving to the rural areas we are seeing light pollution in the rural areas also. Artificial lighting does not necessarily produce light pollution. Light pollution is the term for artificial light that is excessive or intrudes where it is not wanted.

On July 13th and 14th, the International Dark Sky Association met with representatives of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate to conduct informational briefings. These sessions were intended as a general introduction to the problems caused by light pollution and what can be done to reduce wasted outdoor lighting.

Energy is wasted when light spills up to the universe, is used when not needed, or if the light uses more wattage than needed. Wasted light is wasted energy; it has been estimated that over one billion dollars per year are wasted lighting up the night sky instead of directing the light downward only where it is needed. In addition, safety and security are compromised when glaring light causes dark shadows and our eyes do not accommodate to the background darkness. Glare is blinding and objects become invisible. Just drive past a bright gas station at night and you will see how too much light actually blinds drivers and makes driving unsafe.

What are some solutions to Light Pollution?

1. Use lights only when and where necessary.
2. Shield or recess the bulbs so no glare is visible. According to the National Park Service, 50% of light from a typical unshielded fixture is wasted, shining upward where it is not needed. Another 10% in the mid range just causes glare, and only 40% is productive because that portion of the light shines downward.
3. Aim fixtures downward so no light spills upward or leaves your property. A good rule of thumb is to purchase and install outdoor lighting where the bulb is completely shielded. Draw a horizontal line equal to the very bottom of the fixture. If all the light shines downward from that line, the fixture is a Dark Sky approved fixture.
4. Use low wattage, energy-efficient bulbs that do not over-light an area compared to the background lighting. High and low pressure sodium bulbs, and the newer LED lights are energy efficient. They use little energy, but provide lots of light where you need it.
5. Turn off the lights when not needed.

When I first moved to Kerr County, I had the privilege of talking with a rancher and she told me she did not use outdoor lighting. If you needed to walk outside at night, give yourself a minute and your eyes would adjust. If you were still uncomfortable, she kept a flashlight by the door and she would walk you to your car.

A couple of articles that will provide more information on the subject are:



[Our Vanishing Night](#) in the November 2008 issue of National Geographic
[Switch on the Night – Policies for Smarter Lighting](#) at Environmental Health Perspectives

The Aspen Recreation Center in Aspen, Colorado, won the 2004 IDA