

Offered Title: Good Light, Bad Light

Our Sun gives light; make hay while the Sun shines is the adage, meaning get it done before the Sun sets or before the rains come. In the time before electric lighting this saying was a farmer's mantra because there was no way to make hay at night – can't see. When the Sun set your animals and equipment better be in the barn. It's night. It's dark. A full Moon helps but that's once per month.

Electricity has re-defined living. We can see in the dark, we can light up our world and make it daytime anytime. I am thankful for the wonders electricity has brought.

You might have an inkling where I'm going with this.

As an amateur astronomer I have a prejudice, for dark skies. We moved to the hill country from Houston to enjoy this natural resource, and its great! The question is, how to maintain this wonderful aspect of hill country living? That is a challenge.

We all like to feel secure and lighting gives us the ability to spot potential threats. This lighting, be it street lights, parking lot lights, or yard security lights, can provide security without negatively impacting the night sky.

Entertainment venues seem more exciting when lit up at night, and that doesn't have to ruin the night sky.

Businesses need night lighting for parking and/or advertising and to showcase the business. This can be done without ruining the night sky.

All the lighting I have mentioned above can do their jobs without a significant impact on our night sky. So, why do so many communities have less than great night skies? It's the fixtures.

The key to having our light and night sky too...ready for the big reveal? ...is directing light to its intended place. What a concept eh?

Much of the outdoor night lighting in use currently throws light sideways and even behind the fixture. Why? No shields directing the light to its desired location. So, this sideways and backward light is wasted. Know what else? This sideways and backward light is spilling into the night sky. Its called light pollution. This light spill causes the night sky to brighten. My night sky 30 miles north of Houston was bright gray, only the brightest stars, planets, Moon, and of course Sun were visible.

Look around at night. A properly shielded light fixture directs light to the desired place. You can easily tell if it isn't properly shielded. If it is producing glare (you see the bulb) it is not properly shielded. Of course, even a properly shielded overhead light fixture, such as a street light will have glare if you are right under it. Check out Dripping Springs, they do it right.

Questions? The Hill Country Alliance can help. www.hillcountryalliance.org

What's in the Sky?

November 20th. Catch a crescent Moon, Saturn, (and with binoculars, Mercury below them) in the southwestern sky just after sunset.