

Offered Title: Are the Stars out Tonight?

Depends.

The stars, planets and other celestial sparklers are up there but not always out. There are obstacles like clouds that just get in the way. More insidious, bright light will make them seem to disappear. The light can be nearby or miles distant, but the effect is similar. Clouds eventually go away, the Sun sets, the Moon too. We can even learn the Moon's phases to avoid its brightness, but bright light installed by a human is frequently unavoidable.

The trend has been 'light the night and make it bright'! Are the stars out tonight? Not as many.

But wait! There is hope, because of folks who come up with win-win solutions. The stars can be out, and we can have our night lit up too. We just need to make the light work smarter. How is that done?

The solution in hindsight seems simple. Direct your light to where it's needed and block it from heading into the sky. The sky, stars, Sun, Moon, planets etc. don't need it. Your neighbor probably doesn't need it either. OK, I know the solution so how to implement it? Yeah, there's always a complication, even in the simplest plan. Sure, you can take care of your own lighting, but what about neighbors, your community, town, city? Seems to get exponentially harder.

Neighbors can be tricky. You must consider relationships. They don't want anyone telling them how they should take care of their own property. Maybe it is better to canvass/survey your neighborhood regarding the night sky and get an idea how many want to preserve or improve it. This might be done via your neighborhood email/social media group or your management company if your neighborhood has one. If a majority respond in the affirmative, you can publish the result in support of getting neighbors to adjust their lighting as needed. You might even get offers of help with the modifications. Most neighborhoods have electricians or handy people that might be willing to at least give instruction.

Larger communities, towns, and cities require a more sophisticated approach. This is where local organizations can assist and provide supporting documentation. We have local, state, and international organizations dedicated to preserving/improving our night sky. They are usually available to present at meetings, including board meetings where decisions are made about community infrastructure. Don't expect to affect immediate changes or even agreement. Government is not usually able to implement right away even when they agree. The idea is to encourage. Government must partner with many diverse groups so the bigger the community the longer the process.

Here are some helpful organizations:

International Dark Sky Association (ida.org, datexas.org), Hill Country Alliance (hillcountryalliance.org), Dark Sky Society (darkskysociety.org), The Consortium for Dark Sky Studies (darkskystudies.org)

What's in the Sky?

09/23; 2:50 am; Autumnal Equinox

09/26+; pre-dawn; east: From a dark site look for a faint triangle of light pointing upward this is Zodiacal Light