

Talking To Your Neighbor

As dark sky enthusiasts, one of the more challenging and stressful situations can be discussing lighting issues with our neighbors. Fortunately Dark Sky International has some great advice which can be found at methowdarksky.org/dsi-neighbors.

In general, it's a good idea to first be on friendly terms with your neighbors. Light pollution and trespass shouldn't be the first topic you've discussed together. If you prefer to write a message, refer to the bottom of the above webpage for advice.

Start by asking a question: "can we talk about your outdoor lighting?". If you get a positive response, you can then proceed to discuss the issue. Recognize, your neighbor may not even realize that their unshielded lighting is shining on your property or your house. Explain how the light trespass impacts you. Perhaps it interferes with your ability to observe the night sky or see clearly in your own yard. Maybe it shines on your bedroom window (light is bad for sleeping). You can also explain that excess light at night is bad for wildlife, wastes energy and money and may make your area less safe (see methowdarksky.org/dsi-light-pollution). Be prepared to listen to their concerns as many people feel that more light makes them safer even though there is no conclusive evidence that this is true.

If you can get agreement to address the problem, be prepared to help develop, select and implement alternatives to minimize lighting issues. While the easiest solution is to turn the lights off, other easy solutions include using less bright lights and lights with a more yellow color (correlated color temperature of 3000 K or less). Ideally, shielded fixtures, motion sensors and/or timers should also be used. Find dark sky approved fixtures at methowdarksky.org/dsi-lighting.

To keep the conversation moving in the right direction, try not to engage in actions that are counter-productive such as getting angry or threatening legal action. This can create hard feelings that are very difficult to overcome.

Finally, make sure you lead by example and your own home uses dark sky lighting. You can start by doing a home lighting assessment (methowdarksky.org/dsi-assessment).

Remember that preserving a dark night sky is a shared goal, and approaching the situation with empathy and a neighborly attitude can go a long way in finding mutually beneficial solutions. Be sure to thank your neighbor for their willingness to work together to address the issue.

The Methow Valley Dark Sky Coalition expresses our gratitude for those concerned about preserving our night sky. Anyone is welcome to contact us to discuss dark sky matters at info@methowdarksky.org.