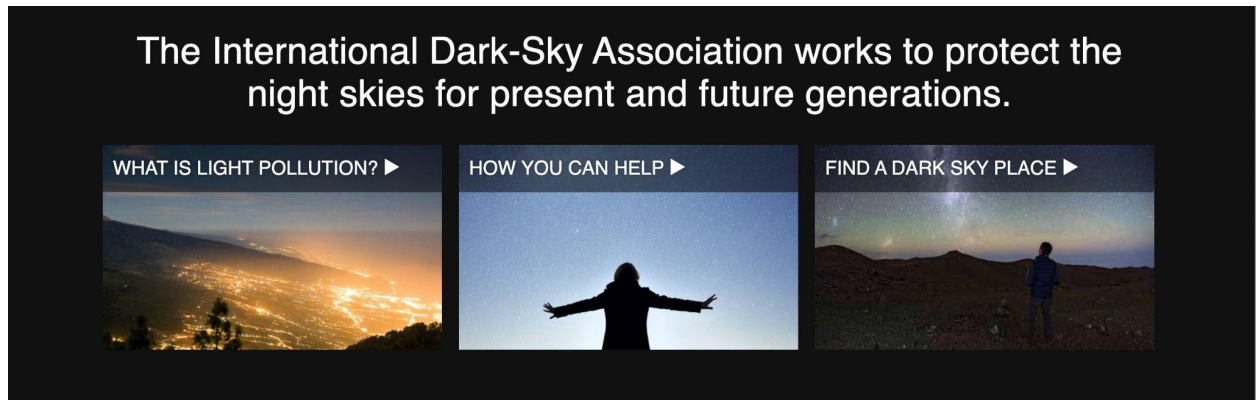


Dark Skies – It's a Matter of Life and Health

by Peter Kraus

All over the world, people are living under the nighttime glow of artificial light, and it is causing big problems for humans, wildlife, and the environment. There is a global movement, Dark Skies, to reduce light pollution, and everyone can help.



When we talk about environmental pollution, we usually think of traffic and CO₂ emissions, or plastic waste covering our beaches and large swaths of the ocean. But what about the lightbulb?

The lightbulb, or artificial light, is one of mankind's most amazing inventions. It's a great thing! We depend on light to guide us home when it's dark out, and it makes our homes cozy and bright after dark. However, like carbon dioxide emissions and plastic, too much artificial light also has a negative impact on the environment. Light pollution, the excessive or inappropriate use of outdoor artificial light, is beginning to affect human health, wildlife behavior, and our ability to observe stars and other celestial objects.

Today, over 99% of Americans (and Europeans) live in areas of pervasive light pollution, where it's hard to see more than a handful of the brightest stars at night.

Bad for beasts, birds, and bugs – and people

These levels of artificial light can profoundly disturb our natural body rhythms – our circadian rhythm – an internal, twenty-24-hour clock that guides day and night activities and affects physiological processes in humans and nearly all living organisms. Circadian disruption may increase our risk of obesity, diabetes, mood disorders, reproductive problems, and cancers. It can affect our natural sleep patterns, too. A good night's sleep helps reduce weight gain, stress, depression and the onset of diabetes.

Studies show that light pollution also impacts animal behaviors, such as migration patterns, wake-sleep habits, and habitat formation. Sea turtles and birds guided by moonlight during migration get confused by light pollution, lose their way, and often die. Large numbers of insects, a primary food source for birds and other animals, are drawn to artificial lights and die. In response, many cities have adopted a "Lights Out" program to turn off building lights during bird migration.

Get involved!

A growing number of people are taking action to reduce light pollution and restore the natural night sky. Here's what you can do to help restore darker skies:

- **Outdoor lights shine down, not up** – use only fully shielded, IDA dark sky-certified fixtures for all outdoor lighting.
- **Smarten your phone** – adjust your phone settings to limit blue light on your screen at night.

- ***Keep your bedroom dark*** – use blackout curtains and cover or remove light sources such as clock radios.
- **Get involved** – work with neighbors and local government to keep light on the ground and the night skies natural.

There are several organizations working to reduce light pollution. One of these is the U.S.-based International Dark Sky Association (IDA), which educates the public and certifies parks and other places that have worked to reduce their light emissions.

Visit www.darksky.org for more information.