

What if bright lights don't make you as safe as they make you feel?



Many people assume that the more light you use around your property, the safer you will be. However, the research is inconclusive at best. A U.S. National Institute of Justice study concluded: "We can have very little confidence that improved lighting prevents crime." In fact, poor or too much lighting can actually have the opposite effect.

Real security depends on the wise use of lighting. Visibility should always be the goal. Instead of more and brighter lights, we need smart lighting that directs light down where it is most useful. It is possible to see the stars without compromising safety.

"[W]hen risks are carefully considered, local authorities can safely reduce street lighting saving both costs and energy ... without necessarily impacting negatively upon road traffic collisions and crime."

— 2015 study published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health

Light for Visibility, Not Pollution

The key to a truly safe night-time environment is to shield lighting on roadways, parking lots, residences, businesses and landscapes.

Smart lighting that directs light where it will be most useful can help you achieve a balance between safety and starlight. The wise use of lighting can lead to less crime and a greater sense of security, while restoring our view of the night sky.



About IDA

The International Dark Sky Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Tucson, Ariz., is dedicated to preserving the natural nighttime environment by educating policymakers and the public about night sky conservation and promoting eco-friendly outdoor lighting.

Our Mission

To preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through environmentally responsible outdoor lighting.

Our Goals

- Advocate for the protection of the night sky
- Educate the public and policymakers about night sky conservation
- Promote environmentally responsible outdoor lighting
- Empower the public with tools and resources to help bring back the night



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Outdoor Lighting, Crime and Safety



“Brighter” does NOT mean “Safer”

Lighting up the nighttime environment does not necessarily improve safety or security. This may seem contradictory, but there is no clear scientific evidence that increased outdoor lighting deters crime and increases safety.

At Home: Poor Lighting Creates a False Sense of Security



If you rent, own or manage property, you’re probably concerned about keeping it safe from theft or vandalism and keeping you and others safe from physical threats. However, badly designed lighting can actually make you less safe by helping criminals.

Bright and poorly aimed lights can hide danger by creating contrasts between light and dark areas. This makes shadows where criminals can hide. All this light means that criminals can see the contents of parked cars and case the area for onlookers, all without needing to use flashlights, which could alert someone to their presence.

Around Town: Light for Light’s Sake Does Not Equal Safety

Towns, cities and businesses often install lighting in parks, shopping areas, parking lots and other public places to improve safety.

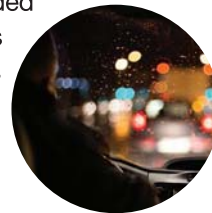
Improperly aimed and poorly shielded lights can actually attract criminals and allow them to see what they’re doing. Property damage may be exacerbated by too many lights, particularly dawn-to-dusk lighting. A study by the city of Chicago actually found a correlation between increased crime and brightly lit alleyways.



On the Road: Bad Lighting Creates Unsafe Driving Conditions

Poorly designed lighting on roadways and highways contribute to tragic accidents. Motorists and pedestrians can be temporarily blinded by glare from unshielded streetlights and electronic signs. The problem is more acute for older individuals.

A 2015 study published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health found that streetlights don’t prevent accidents or crime, but do cost a lot of money.



Solutions

Effective lighting that helps people be safe, not just *feel* safe, is a win-win situation for everyone. You can create a safer environment while keeping the night natural. Here are some simple rules to follow:

- Use fully shielded, dark-sky friendly fixtures. That means lights shine down, not up, and don’t create glare and contrasts.
- Only use lights when and where needed. Install timers and dimmer switches, and turn off lights when not in use. If you must have security lighting, use motion sensors.
- Use the right amount of light. Too much light is wasteful and impairs vision.
- Use long-wavelength lights with a red or yellow tint to minimize negative health effects.
- Good lighting design can mitigate glare. Cities and towns can restrict the use of bright signs and flashing lights near roadways.

Poor Lighting Reduces Safety and Security

Glare from bright, unshielded lights actually decreases safety. See how glare in the photo on the right makes it hard to see the man at the gate? Glare creates deep shadows, making it more difficult to see. It also shines into your eyes, constricting your pupils. This diminishes your eyes’ ability to adapt to low-light conditions. So, is that bright light really making this area safer?



Visit darksky.org and join IDA for resources and more information.