

De-lighting the night for a better view of the sky

Environmentalism has made news for last three decades and there are valid pros and cons as to how significant it is. Since man can remember, the dark night skies have been timeless and consistent until the industrial revolution. However, one form of ecological contamination had been creeping in like a noxious gas since the 1900s, and that is light pollution. Most don't consider this too hazardous until you take a closer look. Al Scott, president of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC), Ottawa, wrote to his local newspaper warning the public that it's much more dangerous than we imagine. Excessive, unnatural lighting is known to impact nocturnal wildlife and interrupt the human circadian rhythm with direct effects on human hormones and childhood development. The American Medical Association has recently stated that this constant barrage of artificial light on the circadian system may increase the risk of cancer. While no one is suggest-



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The Sky's the Limit

ing to totally eliminate it, no doubt it needs to be better managed. Responsible municipalities are now replacing these bulbous glare-bombs with more efficient luminaires having a flat pane of glass on the bottom. Full cut-off lighting fixtures project light only where it is needed, which is the ground, and not up into the sky or directly into the eyes of drivers and pedestrians. Individual citizens' likewise can achieve similar benefits by using only use full cut-off light fixtures. Full cut-off means that the light source is not visible from the side or above, and, thus, shines all of its light onto the ground. Also, consider turning the lights out altogether if not needed. I haven't used my night lights on the farm for years, and not only has it saved

money, but it has also given me a ring side show to the celestial sky when I walk out on my deck. I believe the British novelist Llewelyn Powys said it best: "No sight is more provocative of awe than is the night sky!"

Sky watch for the next month

The moon will rise with Saturn on Jan. 6. Look to the southeast-east horizon any time after 4 a.m., and the bright spot rising with the moon is Saturn. You can follow it right to sunrise as the planet disappears into the day sky but the planet will stay visible.

Jupiter will be right next to the Gibbous Moon from dusk to dawn in the east sky on Monday, Jan. 21. The king planet will almost look stuck to the moon all night until they both set in the northwest-west.

Public events for the next month

Check out our first stargazing event for 2013, which also happens to be on Friday, Jan. 11, courtesy of the RASC, Calgary, starting at 7:30 p.m. A brief indoor presentation will be followed by stargazing with

the 11-inch telescope and binocular outside (weather permitting). All are welcome, there is no charge and refreshments are provided. Experts will be on hand to explain the heavens, teach scoping skills and help you develop your knowledge of the sky. For further information, visit www.vulcantourism.com or contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994.

The Saturday Observer's Night at the Telescope Farm in Didsbury occurs at the All Star Telescope (www.all-startelescope.com) just outside Didsbury on Jan. 20 from 7 p.m. until midnight. Everything is provided at no charge. I am planning to attend, and you are welcome to caravan with a group I am assembling. We leave Vulcan at about 3:30 p.m. weather permitting. We stop for a Chinese Buffet before heading to the celestial farm for the evening and Tim Hortons on the way back. For further information contact Ken From at 866-310-8844. Visit www.all-startelescope.com/pages/observer-nights for more information.