

## Outdoor Lighting Ordinances and Community Standards

**Purpose of the Ordinance:** Outdoor lighting ordinances encourage better quality lighting, lighting which reduces glare, light trespass, and energy waste. It protects the nighttime environment and preserves our heritage of beautiful night skies.

**Terms Used in the Ordinance:** The ordinance and the definitions should be easy to understand.

**Downward Directed Light:** Shield or “Full Cutoff” lighting is a must.

**Privacy Issues:** Light trespass or “spill light” should be addressed.

**Glare Reduction and Control:** These problems adversely impact traffic and personal safety.

**Environment Issues:** Locations near wildlife areas must consider the adverse impacts of night lighting, such as with sea turtles and migrating bird life.

**E-zones:** Many codes are now including the concept of E-zones to distinguish between different types of lighting areas. For example, near national or state parks, or wildlife refuges, or astronomical observatories there should be much lower levels of lighting than in city centers.



An example of a full cutoff low pressure sodium fixture.

**Energy Waste:** Quality lighting can reduce the demand for electricity.

**Curfews and Time Controls:** Turn off unneeded lighting. If a business closes, they don’t need all their lighting all night. Sports lighting should always be turned off when the events are over.

**Lighting Levels:** New service stations, convenience stores, and some shopping malls are installing outdoor lighting that is much brighter than levels recommended by national and international lighting organizations. Such lighting can compromise safety rather than help, and it wastes energy.

**Exceptions:** Do some kinds of lighting need to be excepted? Examples are low level holiday lighting, quality monument lighting, and such. Time controls should still be used.

**Astronomical Issues:** Many observatories are badly impacted by poor lighting practices.

**“Sunset” or “Grandfathering”:** Should the ordinance exempt all present lighting? Or should such lighting have a time limit set when it must be replaced?

**Enforcement Issues:** Outdoor lighting is somewhat different than other zoning issues. Plan approval is similar, but how to address inspections at night?

**Public Education and Awareness:** This is an essential element in the process, pre-ordinance and afterwards. It is good to involve as many elements of the community as possible, at all stages.

**Note:** IDA has developed an Outdoor Lighting Ordinance Handbook. It covers in much detail all the above issues and more. It is available from IDA, and it is on the IDA Web site: [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org).