

Putting the spotlight on outdoor lighting

Outdoor lights that are left on at night have surprising negative effects on your utility bill, your neighbors and the lake environment. Many people around the lake use lights at night to dispel their feeling of insecurity, but a lot of these lights are wasteful, intrusive and harmful. Bad lighting creates both glare and sky glow. Glare is the direct shining of a light into an observer's eye, and sky glow is the composite illumination of the sky.

The effects of light pollution on the lake environment are numerous and complex. As many organisms are nocturnal or depend on natural light patterns to time their life cycles, artificial light at night can alter their behavior and hamper their survival. Some animals rely on changing daylight hours to predict what time of year it is. An abundance of light at night may confuse them into thinking the days are longer. This could cause them to reproduce too early in the spring when weather and food supplies are not suitable or delay their southern migration or preparations to overwinter in the fall.

Critters that become active at night in the safety of darkness may not do so if there is too much light. This could prevent them from feeding and reproducing, which could then create a food shortage for predators. Other organisms, particularly insects, that are attracted to light become very vulnerable to predation and could exhaust their energy reserves by continuously wandering around the light ring. But improper outdoor lighting does not only affect the lake environment, it also affects people.

In addition to light pollution, bad lights create light trespass, invading the neighbors. The glare from excessive lights can shine into the yard and windows of neighbors even across the lake. Improper lighting could be detrimental to a good relationship with your neighbors or even the community. It is not pleasant to have someone else's light shining in your bedroom window when you are trying to sleep. Many people find it unpleasant to have their own outdoor light on at night, but leave it on for the feeling of security it gives them.

It is a common misconception that bright lights are better for security. In fact, extraordinarily bright lights generate dark shadows for crooks to hide in while glare makes it difficult for the eye to adjust to the extreme light-dark contrast and for police to see into those shadows. Bright lights give criminals light to see what they are doing. Very bright lights produce more light pollution, which is nothing more than wasted energy, costing you money.

Using proper types of lights and fixtures dramatically reduces all of these negative effects at a surprising rate. Low wattage (18, 35 or 55), low-pressure sodium lights are one of the best types of lights for energy savings and creating the right amount of light to properly illuminate an area for security purposes. Fixtures that completely shield the bulb and direct light only where it is needed ensure that no light is wasted, allowing a low wattage bulb to produce the same amount of usable light as a high wattage bulb in an open fixture. A shielding fixture is also important in reducing light trespass, light pollution and glare.. Although better bulbs and fixtures may cost more initially, they will pay for themselves in energy savings in approximately 2 years.

For more information contact the Lake Windermere Project at 341-6898. You can also visit the Project office located in the old District of Invermere office beside the Invermere Community Centre. The Lake Windermere Project is a non-profit, long-term comprehensive stewardship

program dedicated to safeguarding the health of our lake. The Lake Windermere Project is a partnership of local, provincial and federal government, First Nations and community groups.