

“Light Pollution Infographic”

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EDITORIAL

Bring back the stars

Light pollution is more than just an eyesore



(DC Illustration/ Lindsey Welch)

Humans' connection to the stars runs deep in our history. Centuries ago, we would look to the night sky to know when to harvest our crops. We created entire systems of navigation from the night sky to travel to distant lands and find our way back home. We told tales of heroes and monsters out of patterns we saw written in the stars.

Our religions, sciences, and understanding of the universe all began with people looking up—wondering what was out there. We stargaze, we dream, we create. But what happens when we look to the sky at night and can't see the stars?

Today, artificial light pollutes our skies at an alarming rate. From big-box store parking lots that stay lit all night to that neighbor with an annoyingly bright garage light, excessive artificial lighting has become the norm. And many of us go about our lives in blissful ignorance of what we're losing—and what we're harming—because of it.

Light pollution doesn't just erase the night sky. It harms our health, cal ecosystems, and wastes an enormous amount of energy.

When humans are exposed to artificial light at night, it disrupts our circadian rhythm, which can cause all sorts of mental and physical health issues. A poor night's sleep from exposure to artificial light has been linked to a higher risk of depression, obesity, cancer, heart disease and sleep disorders, among other health issues. This is in part because of our eyes' sensitivity to blue light, which LEDs emit plenty of. Switching to warmer light bulbs can reduce some of the negative effects of artificial light.

Animals suffer from our desperate desire for bright nights as well. The Great Lakes region is an important area for migratory birds in North America, and light pollution from cities like Detroit, Saginaw or Bay City can confuse birds that use the moon and stars to navigate long distances. Disoriented birds sometimes veer off course, causing exhaustion or fatal collisions with buildings. And important insects naturally attracted to light face similar issues, dying from exhaustion as they fly endlessly around a light bulb. These birds and insects are important pollinators, so the ripple effect from light pollution ends up harming Michigan native plant life.

Then there is the issue of excessive energy consumption. According to DarkSky International, 30% of outdoor lighting in the U.S. is wasted, amounting to \$3 billion in wasted energy annually. That's not just a hit to our wallets—it's a blow to sustainability efforts, contributing to unnecessary carbon emissions.

But here's the good news: light pollution is one of the most reversible forms of environmental damage. All it takes is some collective action and being more intentional with artificial light.

Efforts can start here at Delta College. On the main campus, Delta's parking lot is filled with lights. These lights have sensors, which reduce energy waste, but we could go further by dimming or shielding the light. Reducing light near Delta's observatory would allow it to take higher quality images of the night sky.

We can also take action off campus. DarkSky International is a nonprofit that works with local chapters to educate communities and assist them in advocating for darker skies. You can connect with the Michigan chapter at darkskymichigan.org or by emailing Robyn Porteen at robynporteen@gmail.com.

Judge's comments: “This infographic is very visually appealing, showing the difference light pollution can make in seeing the stars. I'm not quite sure what “on” and “off” mean in this context. I think there could have been a header and a short description to better describe what's going on. It would have been neat to see the illustration using actual campus buildings, also, instead of generic ones.”