RED LIGHT ETIQUETTE

by Steve Mock

Seasoned Observers and Old Hands to the hobbies of observational astronomy, astrophotography, and imaging should already be well- versed in the practice of **Red Light Etiquette**. Here=s a short reminder for both Newcomers and Old Timers alike on the whats, whys and hows.

WHAT is RED LIGHT ETIQUETTE?

Red Light Etiquette is the avoidance of all extraneous light sources except dim red light while you and others around you are engaged in astronomical observing, photography and imaging: especially important when involving dim objects.

WHY Practice RED LIGHT ETIQUETTE?

For visual astronomy, we practice **Red Light Etiquette** to optimize observers' visual sensitivity: allowing them to observe more objects, dimmer objects, and more detail in observed objects. Similarly, for astrophotography and imaging, we practice **Red Light Etiquette** so that stray light does not interfere with the photographic / imaging process.

HOW do Courteous Astronomers Practice RED LIGHT ETIQUETTE?

Barring issues of safety, minimize the use of all lights. Yes, this even pertains to red lights !
When observing at night, it=s really not that dark outside; there is the light of stars, [Moon,] planets, airglow, and artificial light pollution. Just ***two or three minutes*** outside in an observing area will give most people the time needed to dark-adapt enough to see other people=s faces and equipment without the use of ***any*** extraneous sources of light: preserving night vision for things astronomical. Another way to say this –
Lights [even red lights] should not be used as an excuse for one=s impatience to dark adapt.

If you ***do*** have a need for extra light during an observing / imaging session, please make sure that it is:

RED - Deep red monochromatic [pure] light is best for preserving dark adaptation.
In a pinch, a red-filtered white light source may do, but be aware that this will compromise the dark adaptation of yourself and others. The reason: most red-filtered white light sources still contain other wavelengths of light [in particular blue-green light.] Our retina's night vision cells [known as "rods"] peak in sensitivity in the blue-green range of the spectrum and are not very sensitive to the red. Since we're trying to avoid non-astronomical light sources that compromise our night vision and visual sensitivity, **keep it pure red**.

DIM – Use your red light at the lowest intensity as is possible.
The brighter the red light, the greater the loss of dark adaptation

INFREQUENT - Whenever possible, use your dark-adapted eye NOT a light source.
Turning off lights when not in use will maintain your night vision extremely well and it saves on batteries too.

AIMED DOWNWARDS - Do not aim lights into people=s faces or onto their equipment.
A hands-free Aheadlamp@ is not an appropriate tool for astronomy when it shines into other people=s eyes.
Reflected glare off someone=s astronomical equipment while you Acheck it out@ unannounced is often not appreciated

COVER UP, **TURN OFF**, **CLOSE UP** - Turn off ALL lights when not in use.

a) Cover up those pesky LED=s associated with your equipment; electrical tape or duct tape works well.
b) Computer screens should be dimmed, reddened, and aimed away from visual observers.
c) Motor vehicle inside and outside lights can be a big nuisance: try to arrive and set up before dark. (At the very least, turn off or cover up dome lights and other interior lights, and don't forget to inform others in the observing/imaging area before entering or leaving in your vehicle.)
d) Lit tobacco products in an observing / imaging area are [obviously] a no-no in more ways than one. (Smoke is bad for lungs ***and*** optics !!)
e) Close building doors securely behind you when entering and exiting to prevent light leakage.

SAVE YOUR PRECIOUS NIGHT VISION AND THAT OF OTHERS FOR THINGS ASTRONOMICAL !!