

Star Parties in a City

If you are attending an event in a city then the following will make the experience more enjoyable for yourself and the others attending:

Leave flashlights at home, and omit lighted toys or rings. As your eyes adjust to the dark, you'll be able to see well. Most cities star parties have plenty of unwanted light anyway. Many astronomical objects are rather faint, and you need to get acclimated to the dark. For the same reason, please resist the urge to take flash pictures. We can accommodate photos during the setup period, prior to full darkness.

Bring warm clothes -- a sweater or jacket, as the air cools quickly after dark, even after a warm day. Dress for weather about 10 degrees cooler than what is forecast.

Don't carry food and drinks around the scopes. Spills are a problem for the scopes and also for those around them -- it's no fun walking around in sticky shoes.

Be careful not to touch the telescopes, unless the astronomers instruct you.

Telescopes move very easily and will lose what we are looking at.

Your fingers will damage sensitive optics and mirrors

Worse, you may lose your balance!

Don't Spray Mosquito Repellent near Telescopes

If you use mosquito repellent, stay well away and downwind from telescopes

No Smoking –

Smoke damages expensive optics and the lungs of others

Large Youth Groups –

Should have adult supervision in a ratio proportional to expected behaviors and be told the rules in advance

Green Laser Pointers can permanently damage eyes.

They are not toys and should not be used by the general public attending the Star Party

They should only be used by people running the Star Party to point out objects in the sky

Step Stools and Ladders –

We will provide a chair or stepladder to steady yourself. Please use it!

Toddlers - are too young to understand how to look into the telescope, nor can they make sense of what's going on. When lifted, their natural tendency is to grab onto whatever is available, and that's usually the telescope.

While you are welcome to bring toddlers, don't try to have them to look through telescopes

Don't just look once -After we show the first group of objects, we'll move the scopes to additional objects. So, after making the rounds of the telescopes, go back again, as we may have something new. We also take requests.

Public Star Parties Away from the City

FAAC holds public events Lake Erie Metropark and Island Lake Recreation Area to avoid the light pollution of the city. We move away from the central city specifically to take advantage of the dark skies. After driving for an hour or more all of those attending have higher expectations of everyone's behavior.

First, Do Everything in the Previous Section

In Addition,

No Bright Light - The **most important** rule of star parties is to keep it dark. No white flashlights, no Coleman lanterns, no using cellphones or PDAs as a flashlight, no camera flashes, and especially no car headlights.

Use *Dim Red Light* - If you need light, a dim red light is best -- that's what astronomers use to read their star charts. A small red LED flashlight is great. But any dim flashlight with a piece of red cellophane stretched over the front works fine.

Nothing in Your Hands - Some of the scopes will have open frames where the mirror is exposed. Set down anything you are holding before trying to look into the scope. One slip could damage an expensive mirror!

Watch Those Car Lights - Turn off any dome lights in your car before you get to the star party. Turn off your headlights and drive slowly with parking lights. Park so you will not have to back up.

Dress warmly. No, even warmer than that - Few people realize just how chilly it gets late at night, even in summer. Sites away from the city are also higher where it will be colder.

Non-Public Dark Sky Observing

During most FAAC Events the public is invited to look through the telescopes we provide. For these we relax the expectations somewhat.

We do conduct star parties every year that are intended for private viewing. You are still welcome to attend, but must bring and use your own scope. Examples of these non-public events are the "Dark Sky Events" and Messier Marathons, and FAAC members observing at private sites. Here there are very high expectations for everyone's behavior.

Again, Do Everything in the previous sections

In addition to the etiquette for a public event here are some additional things you must do

Strictly Follow the Light Rules - In these situations there is little tolerance for not obeying the light rules. The entire purpose of traveling to a dark site is to observe very dim objects. One mistake can prevent someone from finding that elusive glob for 30 Minutes or more.

Double Check Your Car's Dome Light

It said Dim Red Light- One of the most common mistakes is to confuse *Red* with *Dim*. Even though you may be using a red light, if it is bright it is a problem. Be aware of how bright your lights are. Be aware of where they are pointing

Unfiltered Laptops are a No No - Laptops (even those with a "Night Mode") can be bright enough to cast shadows. FAAC recommends use of red plastic filters.

Announce *Before You Leave* - Many modern cars do not allow driver control of the headlights. Park your car facing away from observers so that if headlights do come on, they will not shine in everyone's eyes directly. Announcing that you are leaving allows everyone to shield their eyes. Note: Some parties restrict when people can leave. Be sure you know the rules before you go.

Green Laser are Generally Not Welcome - follow the rules of the specific star party. If there are individuals doing astro-photography a green laser can ruin their night.

Please No Music - Music tastes differ so violently that it's usually best to avoid it -- chances are that your favorite band isn't the favorite of everybody else in the parking lot. If you really want to listen to music, use headphones or if it is a small group, ask them if they mind.

Some People Want To Work on their Own - While private observing sessions are frequently very social, some people have their own priorities. Anyone imaging would generally prefer you stay well away from their scopes. **Use good social judgment.**

Recommendations for Astronomers Participating in Public Events

Limit Amount of Equipment – One telescope or set of binoculars is all one person can watch when there are many people in the area. Limit the number of accessories too, the more you have, the more you have to watch.

Use less expensive Eyepieces

People at a public event may not know how to use eyepieces and may stick their fingers or nose on the eyepiece. Save your premium eyepieces for your own use.

Point out the Eyepiece

People who have never looked through a telescope may not know where to look. Point to the eyepiece or show them how to look through it.

Bring a Stool or Small Ladder

Depending on your equipment and what you are looking at, the eyepiece may not be in a location where both small children and adults can look through it. A ladder or stool with a hand grip is helpful in keeping people more steady.

Don't be afraid to Speak Up

If someone is doing something that might damage your equipment or cause injury, tell them to stop. Give instructions before letting people use your equipment (“don't touch the telescope, just look through the eyepiece”)

Use Glowtape

If you have equipment that sticks into the area in which people will be walking, put glow tape on the equipment (like the legs of a tripod)