

RAILROAD COMMISSION OF TEXAS

Oil and Gas Division



NOTICE TO OIL AND GAS OPERATORS

Minimizing Lighting Impacts from Oil and Gas Activities

Updated Notice to Operators, February 2019

This updated Notice to Operators is to advise you of new, recommended lighting practices to preserve the dark skies necessary for the University of Texas McDonald Observatory in the Davis Mountains of West Texas. These recommended practices are the result of a collaborative effort by the McDonald Observatory, Permian Basin Petroleum Association, Texas Oil and Gas Association and the American Petroleum Institute. To [view *Recommended Lighting Practices*](#), visit the Railroad Commission of Texas website.

Original Notice to Operators, February 2016

The Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) has been contacted about concerns related to light originating from oil and gas rigs in the Permian Basin, specifically in the vicinity of the University of Texas McDonald Observatory in the Davis Mountains of West Texas. Since 2010, the development associated with the exponential growth of oil and gas drilling and production in the Permian Basin has generated light reflecting off the sky.

The McDonald Observatory is a state-of-the-art facility on the cutting edge of scientific research in the field of astronomy. Astronomers there focus on measuring objects at the very edge of the observable universe. Without mitigation, the gleam of light from oil and gas operations could compromise the research for which the McDonald Observatory is famous.

The McDonald Observatory will also soon complete a major upgrade to its historic Hobby-Eberle telescope. If a solution to bright skies is found, the upgrade will allow three-dimensional glimpses deep into the universe.

In 2011, the Texas Legislature revised Section 240.032 of the Local Government Code to require the commissioners court of a county, any part of which is located within 57 miles of the McDonald Observatory, to adopt orders regulating the installation and use of outdoor lighting in any unincorporated territory of the county. The counties where this requirement applies are Brewster, Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Pecos, Presidio, and Reeves. You are advised to check with any of these counties in which you operate regarding applicable outdoor lighting requirements.

In addition, the McDonald Observatory is working with its local neighbors to promote simple solutions to minimize lighting impacts. Stacy Locke with Pioneer Energy Services and Bill Wren with the University of Texas McDonald Observatory have developed a report titled "Oilfield Lighting Can Coexist with Dark Skies," which is available on the observatory's website at

http://mcdonaldobservatory.org/sites/default/files/oilfield_lighting_can_coexist.pdf. More general information about the McDonald Observatory's Dark Skies Initiative is available at <http://mcdonaldobservatory.org/darkskies>.

You are encouraged to consult these resources and consider ways to reduce stray light. The solutions can be simple and cost effective and can actually improve nighttime visibility and increase worker safety.

Please Forward to the Appropriate Section of Your Company