

The Honorable John Dingell, Chairman,
U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Rick Boucher, Chairman
U.S. House Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality

Dear Sirs:

I am writing in response to your call for comment, issued February 27th, concerning proposed legislation on the issue of climate change.

The New England Light Pollution Advisory Group is a volunteer organization that seeks to improve the quality of outdoor lighting in the Northeast U.S. From our perspective, poor-quality outdoor lighting represents a significant source of wasted energy. According to the DOE's Energy Information Administration, lighting consumes more than 100 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually in the U.S. (9% of all electricity generated). This equates to roughly 60 million barrels of oil and thus some 30 million tons of CO₂ injected into the atmosphere each year.

Not all lighting is wasteful, of course, and we do need some light at night for safety and security. However, in the vast majority of cases, installed lighting is wasteful because it is not directed properly onto its target area, is too intense for the intended purpose, and remains on when not needed.

Poorly designed outdoor fixtures typically send one-third of their light directly -- and uselessly -- up into the sky. A single 400-watt floodlight, left on from dusk-to-dawn every night, consumes 1600 KWh of electricity -- roughly equivalent to one barrel of oil. And unshielded floodlights of this type have been installed by the millions nationwide by businesses and utility companies with little regard to established best practices for quality lighting.

And there is more than energy waste at stake. Poor-quality lighting creates harsh glare that reduces our ability to see well at night, thus actually reducing safety and security. Recent biomedical studies have built a compelling case that too much ambient light at night disrupts the body's production of melatonin, a compound that is key to our health and well-being. Equally deleterious is the effect that outdoor lighting has on migratory birds and other wildlife.

For all these reasons, NELPAG encourages you to include language in your legislation that will direct the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy to initiate a national campaign to improve the quality of outdoor lighting. In doing so, we will achieve far more good than reducing energy consumption significantly. We will also improve the safety and security of the nighttime environment, help protect the health of both humans and wildlife, and reduce or slow the pall of light pollution that spoils our view of the night sky.

Thank you for your consideration, and for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely yours,

J. Kelly Beatty, Chairman
New England Light Pollution Advisory Group