

San Diego Astronomy Association

Rules for Star Parties

These rules are intended to provide direction for members of the San Diego Astronomy Association to safely conduct public star parties yet permitting both members and the general public to pursue the study and enjoyment of astronomy to their fullest satisfaction.

These rules cover star parties at parks, recreational facilities, schools, and the SDAA site at Tierra Del Sol (TDS). At most venues, SDAA volunteers are guests and must adhere to these rules and any additional rules imposed by the venue. For star parties at TDS, additional TDS site rules apply. The Board of Directors and the Site Host(s) will handle violations.

Crowd Control and Safety

1. All SDAA members are representatives of the association and shall exhibit courtesy toward other members and the public. We discourage white flashlights, camera flashes, and running around the telescopes. Members may remind the public of these issues in a polite and constructive manner.
2. Members without telescopes or binoculars are welcome to attend and share their knowledge and enthusiasm.
3. Telescopes must be controlled at all times. This is necessary for the security of the equipment and the safety of the public. It is desirable to have one SDAA volunteer per telescope. The general procedure is for the SDAA telescope operator to provide an appropriate description of what is being presented through the eyepiece.
4. Consider marking walkways to the observing area with traffic cones, glow sticks, or red devices if the group is large.
5. At most venues, parking is adjacent to the observing area. Members should set aside parking such that all volunteers may park in one place with easy access, close to the telescopes, and separate from public parking. Also volunteers may leave early if necessary.
6. Police the area for trip hazards. To the extent possible put away your own accessories, boxes, and cases in your automobile.
7. Make sure that you have step stools or ladders to help younger guests reach your own eyepiece. The small folding stepladders with handle at the top are best. Use devices rated at least 200 pounds because even sixth graders may weigh this much. Do not use milk crates or any unstable device.
8. When children are helped up onto ladders or step stools, they should always be accompanied by a parent and supervised. You should never touch a child for any reason in the dark unless it is a bona fide emergency to prevent injury.
9. For anyone using 110VAC extension cords: A modern UL-approved GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) should be used on any extension cords and it should be located as close to the source of the electricity as possible. Tape over cables with duct tape if they present a trip hazard.
10. For daytime solar events, ensure that all telescopes and equipment have proper filters and unfiltered finder scopes are removed.
11. If some guests are causing a serious problem or threatening other individuals, ask them to stop. If the behavior continues, contact the representative of the venue (school, etc.) first and law enforcement if necessary. **All incidents shall be reported to the SDAA Board of Directors.**

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Emergencies

Dealing with an emergency depends upon the venue. In general, representatives of the host group should step in to address an emergency. In lieu of other direction, the following apply:

1. Do not panic. This seems like such a simple and mundane rule, but it is important not to panic. Keeping a clear head can save lives, including your own.
2. Get to a telephone, either landline or cellular. Cell phones may not work if you chose a remote location, so take this into account. Make sure your cell phone is charged before leaving for the event!
3. Call the appropriate authorities, and carefully and calmly describe the situation to them.
4. Do not move an individual who is down unless they are in imminent danger.
5. **If you have not been trained in emergency medical techniques, do not apply medical assistance unless someone is in imminent danger of death. Wait for paramedics or other trained personnel to arrive.**
6. Keep others clear of the area so that emergency vehicles are able to quickly arrive and offer assistance.

Equipment

Just about any telescope you have will work well for public astronomy. If your telescope can track objects in the sky, that can be a plus, since you will not need to readjust the scope between viewers to track objects. Also, a smaller scope, or one with an eyepiece close to the ground, is good for youngsters who are often too short to look through a larger scope without help.

For the public, ease-of-use usually trumps fine optics. Choose an eyepiece with magnification that frames the subject well, and that has lots of eye relief. This makes it easier for people to acquire a view through the eyepiece.

You can use expensive eyepieces, but keep in mind you will be cleaning them afterwards. They accumulate a good amount of grime from eyelashes, makeup, etc. deposited by our guests. You might consider devoting a set of inexpensive eyepieces for public astronomy.