

More Streetlights Needed to Curb Crime

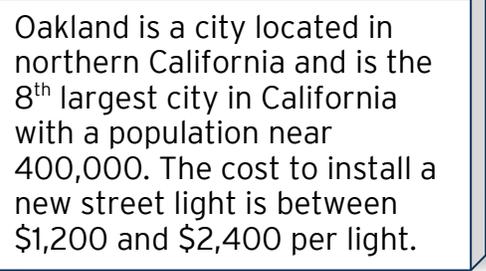
Oakland, CA—To combat the growing crime problem in Oakland, city officials are considering increasing lighting in high crime areas.

Estimates show crime in Oakland is on the rise and has increased 25 percent since the same period the previous year. The current lack of lighting is not accidental; it's a response to a California law imposing energy efficiency standards on outdoor lighting. The law requires cities to begin using energy efficient bulbs and "cap" new lampposts to prevent light from flooding into the sky. Oakland immediately responded to the law by imposing restrictions on 37,000 streetlights within the city limits.

The purpose of the law is to conserve energy and reduce excessive illumination and glare. But Oakland residents are now seeing a spike in crime. Oakland's Assistant Police Chief Howard Jordan wants temporary lighting increases in crime hot spots. Supporters of the new policy argue criminals are attracted to the dark. They don't want to be seen, and when it's dark, they can hide their criminal activities. Supporters also refer to research that links poor lighting and crime.

However, not everyone is in favor of more lighting. L. Norwood of Oakland says her street is quiet and thinks the city should spend the money on other priorities such as repairing streets and sidewalks. Local astronomers and stargazers are also against more street lighting within the city limits. They argue bright street lights cause light pollution and create sky glow that inhibits visibility of stars and changes the whole character of the night sky.

Furthermore, those against increasing street lighting contend there is an economic incentive to keep lights dim. Street lighting can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to maintain. Oakland is currently facing a \$76 million budget shortfall, and public works officials say the city cannot afford new lighting.



Oakland is a city located in northern California and is the 8th largest city in California with a population near 400,000. The cost to install a new street light is between \$1,200 and \$2,400 per light.

Nonetheless, Oakland's City Council is considering a proposal by Vice Mayor Desley Brooks to increase lighting in high crime areas. To address the city's financial problems, she is looking into low-cost lighting options and ways to subsidize new light poles in high crime areas. The vice mayor insists that public safety is of the utmost importance and outweighs any financial concerns.