

Stone-aged Lighting?

We should be proud. We, meaning humans, have a real knack for getting it wrong. Then, scratching our heads for a while and fixing it. We have been good at that for a long time.

As far back as Neanderthals, early man used the club-to-the-head method of courting their mates. We have since become much more gentle and reasonable (although I hear the practice is making a comeback in some of our finer trailer parks).

Thousands of years later, the Romans believed that a chariot was a reasonable explanation of the sun's daily voyage across the heavens. Just five hundred years ago in Europe, the brilliant scholars insisted the world was flat. Science, technology and reality later dispelled those myths and we became smarter.

Even more recently, was a time when women wore rare animal furs around their neck or over their shoulder to convey their status in society. This too is no longer accepted. We became conscious of nature and the world we live in, we became more caring.

What's the point of this? I'd like to bring you up to the current era. I look at something as common as a pole light and have to ask myself, "Are we really that smart, reasonable and caring? What happened to all we've learned?"

Let me explain. Most of us see hundreds of light poles on the daily commute to work. So many, that we have become almost immune to them. We don't even notice them until they burn out. Okay, in our defense, there is a lot to know about outdoor lighting.

The pole light was created as a simple and practical solution for darkness. It's been around almost as long as Edison's light bulb, which by the way, probably won't be around much longer either. The pole light has its strong points. When working, it efficiently illuminates a large area. Well-lit parking lots improve visibility and property value, provide a feeling of safety/security, and draw in customers.

That all sounds great, but here's the reality. HID or high intensity discharge lamps depreciate over their life span. Tonight, look in any commercial parking lot and you'll see some lights brighter and some dimmer. This is what the US Department of Energy calls "Lamp Lumen Depreciation". A light bulb that uses 100% of its intended energy consumption yet only produces 25% of its lumen capacity is a crime against our precious natural resources.

Because of the high cost of bucket truck maintenance, most property owners will let this hole in the tub continue to leak until several lights are out, triggering complaints from tenants and customers. Only then, will he make the uncomfortable call to the electrician.

Because this has been an ongoing trend for longer than I've been around, lighting designers and architects began to overcompensate for the poor maintenance practices with multiple light heads on each pole. This does buy some time for the property owner but at an exponential penalty to the environment. The truth is, one well maintained fixture could illuminate far better than four burned-out or depreciated fixtures.

As a bucket-truck electrician, I can tell you without a shadow of doubt, the problems now outweigh the strong points. I say "now" because until now, the cost of maintenance with a bucket-truck was high but acceptable. Because the cost is primarily based on fuel, labor and insurance the national average to change a \$10 bulb is now about \$400. \$390 squandered unnecessarily at every pole, every year or two. Good for me, bad for the property owner.

The simple reality is that two obstacles drive this dilemma and the need for expensive guys like me. One is the presence of electricity, the other, height of the burned out bulb (25 to 50 feet above the ground).

About three years ago I was introduced to a product, at a Dallas trade show, which addressed both of these problems. "The Retropole" got my undivided attention when I noticed a light head disconnect from its power source and smoothly descend from 25 feet down to a safe working height of 5 feet. I was further impressed by the fact that it worked on any existing pole regardless of its geometry.

After overcoming my initial fear of losing my customers to such a product, I showed the literature to a few of them. My maintenance customers loved the idea of saving money almost as much as the idea of being able to perform the maintenance themselves in real-time for only the cost of the bulb (\$10).

Soon, the other benefits began to show themselves. From a strictly environmental standpoint, the Retropole Light-Lowering System eliminates the bucket truck and its never-ending appetite for fuel. Along with that, goes tons of CO2 that the truck produces.

Other customers quickly realized, and I mentioned earlier, that they no longer needed four light heads on their poles. By reducing down to two, and sometimes even one properly maintained bulb, they are saving enough in electricity alone to justify the upgrade to Retropole.

My lumbering truck spends most of its days in the utility yard now, except of course when its doing a Retropole install. If you own or manage a property with pole lights you owe it to yourself to look at Retropole's Light-Lowering Systems. It is one of the smartest and simplest solutions I've ever seen.

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