

Santa Fe Stargazing Event Best Practices

These best practices are intended to provide direction for Santa Fe Stargazing (SFS) members to safely conduct public and private star parties while permitting both members and the general public to pursue the study and enjoyment of astronomy to their fullest satisfaction. Related stargazing event guidance for visitors has also been developed.

These best practices cover outreach events at parks, recreational facilities, schools and SFS observing sites. At most venues, SFS volunteers are guests and must adhere to these rules and any additional rules imposed by the venue.

Preparation and advanced planning

1. Bring a few red cellophane squares and rubber bands to place over any flashlights that the public might bring.
2. Encourage visitors to bring warm clothing. Even summer nights can be cold at our elevation. Bring layers and expect temperatures that are colder than forecasted.
3. Visitors who bring their own telescope or other equipment, should arrive early to allow for setup and assistance if need be.
4. Identify local rules based on the site owners wishes prior to the event and communicate these local rules to visitors before the event starts.
5. Prepare a list of objects that will be visible at the time and place of the event. Include at least some “eye-candy”: i.e., objects that will have, for the public and/or event guests, a visual appeal in your scope or binoculars. Planets are good, as are Messier objects. Bring sky charts or other locating aids if you will need them.

Crowd Control and Safety

1. All members are SFS representatives 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 always be controlled. This is necessary for the security of the equipment and the safety of the public. It is desirable to have one SFS volunteer per telescope.
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. Volunteers may leave early if necessary.
6. Police the area for trip hazards such as holes in the ground, thorns and rattlesnakes. To the extent possible put away your own accessories, boxes, and cases in your automobile. Consider including glow sticks or red devices at the telescope base.
7. Make sure that you have step stools or ladders to help younger guests reach your eyepiece. The small folding stepladders with handle at the top are best. 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. A single member should be designated during an event to act as the “sky tour” guide. Lasers should only be pointed at the sky at arm’s length. Lasers shall not be used when aircraft are visible or heard. Lasers should never be pointed at the ground, or at any person, animal or object. If dropped, lasers should automatically turn off. Lasers should be utilized only to identify a celestial object (once identified, leave the laser off). Please see the SFS web site Outreach section for additional information.

Equipment

Just about any telescope will work well for public astronomy. 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. You might consider devoting a set of inexpensive eyepieces for public astronomy.

After the event

1. After everything is taken down, do a quick scan of the site and make sure that all trash generated by the event is picked up, and that the site is left as it was found at the start of the event.
2. Make a note of the number of members and visitors that attended and make a mental note of highlights of the event for later reporting.