HOW TO KNOW WHEN IT IS TIME TO REPLACE YOUR PARKING LOT LIGHTING

If you maintain a school campus, one of the first things parents, teachers, and students will see is your parking lot. When those same parents, teachers, or students enter or exit your facility at night, your parking lot lighting has to give them confidence that they are safe.

If your parking lot lights are dim, or if there are dark spots, the chances for criminal activity are much higher than for facilities with well-lit lots. There are several reasons that schools and universities should make sure their lights are up to date and working properly.

Is your parking lot in need of new LED lights? If so, how do you repair or replace your parking lot lighting? Let’s start with considerations about your current parking lot lighting and what it means for your campus facilities.
BURNED OUT PARKING LOT LIGHTS

Burned-out or malfunctioning lights need to be replaced as soon as possible. Some people think that burned-out lights aren’t using any electricity. This is not necessarily true. Even if the lamp is burned out, the ballast is often still drawing power. Indeed, this state of operation is especially bad for the ballast and could result in higher repair costs.

Have a plan in place in advance to address burned-out lights. If you plan to upgrade an old burned-out metal halide lamp with a new LED, it often makes sense to change out the rest of your old parking lot lights as well.

Your school district may also qualify for rebates that can help pay to relamp your entire parking lot. An expert lighting contractor can help you take advantage of rebates and incentives.
UNEVEN PARKING LOT LIGHTING COVERAGE

Uneven parking lot lighting coverage can cause problems for your facility. Every inch of your parking lot should have light coverage for your safety and the safety of your customers and employees.

A lighting expert can help you get the right lamps, fixtures, and designs that will give you the best coverage.

We recently had a client who replaced all the lights in the front parking lot of a high school facility. There were rave reviews about the drastic difference in lighting levels at the school parking lot after dark.

For highly visible parking lots, and especially for less-trafficked secondary or employee parking lots, it is absolutely essential that guests, students, and employees are able to feel safe when accessing their vehicles at night.

Remember that staff and student safety are equally important when accounting for dark areas of your parking lot. Trip and fall hazards are made much more ominous in low-light situations!
LOWER LIGHTING = HIGHER CRIME

A major study in New York City found that certain crimes were reduced by 39% when new exterior LED lighting was installed. Dark parking lots lead to a higher crime rate, putting students and employees at risk. If you have a high crime rate in your parking lot, poor lighting is at least a major contributing factor.

Criminals prefer operating under the cover of darkness, so keeping your lights on goes a long way toward protecting your business, employees, and customers.

Most importantly, even if your parking lot only looks unsafe your students and employees will have a perception that parking in your lot may expose them to criminal activity, a risk they will likely not choose to take.

HIGHER LIGHTING ENERGY COSTS

Keeping your campus facility within budget is not always easy. It’s even harder when you have to light the interior and exterior of a facility. Keeping your parking lights on 24/7 is more expensive than you might think. Review your energy bill to get an idea of how much you spend.

If you consider that replacing old lighting can reduce your energy bill by 50-70%, retrofitting your parking lot lights can reduce your operating expenses.

If you have had your parking lot lights for years, you might not even think about the difference. You could save much more than you might expect.
FREQUENT PARKING LOT LIGHTING MAINTENANCE

Old lights require more maintenance than you might think. Old metal halide lamps have more issues with ballasts and burn out more frequently than updated LED lights.

As these lamps get older and generate more heat, the arc tube deteriorates and can rupture, also causing the outer glass bulb to break as well.

Rather than using inefficient lights that require more time and attention, upgrade to energy-efficient lights that last much longer. You won’t have to replace your lights as often as you did in the past.

WHAT IF A VEHICLE HITS YOUR PARKING LOT LIGHT POLE?

We frequently receive calls about vehicles hitting parking lot lighting poles. (This is especially true in high school parking lots full of brand new drivers!) If a vehicle has damaged one of your light poles, call a licensed electrician as soon as possible.

Whatever you do, do not disturb the area where the pole was damaged. If the pole is leaning and is a potential hazard to your students or staff, barricade the area as wide as possible around the pole so that if it falls, no vehicles will be damaged or people will be injured.

Once a commercial lighting contractor is on-site, they can quickly assess the problem and safely get the pole back in service.
Just as a recap, we wanted to highlight some of the benefits of upgraded parking lot lighting.

We reached out to 31-year FSG veteran Dave Thomas with our Corpus Christi branch for his Top 7 Benefits list:

- Reduce energy usage and cost savings, usually a 50-70% savings
- Higher quality of light from a 5000 kelvin fixture
- Reduced future maintenance costs with the longer life LED fixtures
- Increased light levels in the parking area
- Improve the safety of parents, students, and employees
- Return on Investment (ROI) is usually under 24 months
- Increase confidence and safety for your facility with brighter, safer lots
“ON ANY LIGHTING PROJECT, THE VERY FIRST THING WE DO IS GO OUT AND MEET THE CUSTOMER. AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, LISTEN TO THEM. ONCE WE ARE ON THE JOB, WE TRY TO AFFECT THE BUSINESS AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE. WE WANT TO BE ALMOST INVISIBLE.”

LUKE BOND, FSG INDIANAPOLIS

HOW TO REPLACE YOUR PARKING LOT LIGHTS

So now you’ve decided you need new parking lot lights or repairs to your lighting. How do you do it? Can your maintenance manager replace your lighting? Can a business owner do it? Do you need a licensed commercial electrician to do it?

That depends.

If you just need to change out a lamp on a 12’ decorative pole, you could do this yourself with a ladder. Make sure to follow ladder safety best practices. Refer to the OSHA Portable Ladder Safety guidelines.

But if you are looking to replace a lamp on a 30-foot pole, safely reaching the lamp is a challenge and a portable ladder is not the right equipment.
Most commercial electricians use aerial equipment like boom lifts or bucket trucks to safely and quickly replace parking lot lights.

If you are looking to retrofit your entire parking lot, always call an expert. If you need lighting design or help with meeting municipal codes, an experienced lighting contractor can take care of all that for you. You’ll receive preliminary drawings and a spec sheet for your approval before the job begins.

Importantly, a qualified lighting contractor should understand the importance of minimizing the disruption to your normal operations, and be willing to schedule work for off-hours.

A licensed electrician should also be able to give you an idea of the energy savings you can expect from the new lighting based on the difference in wattage between the old and new lights.

Expert lighting teams know if there are incentives or rebates available. In some cases, rebates or incentives exist that allow campus facility managers to replace entire fixtures instead of just the lamps. The incentives often cover a large percentage of the total cost of the fixture plus labor to install.

Some lighting contractors have drone camera equipment to take “before” overhead shots of your parking lot lights to identify dark spots or problem areas. Once the job is complete they can provide “after” photos of the parking lot so you can see the difference that the retrofit made for your campus.

Whether you have one lamp to replace or 100, the right lighting contractor will pay close attention to details and will leave your parking lot looking better than it did when it showed up. Most importantly, a pro will back up their work and stand with you throughout the life of your new lighting equipment.

**GETTING STARTED**

If you need to replace your school’s parking lot lights or have questions about lighting maintenance or parking lot lighting design, give us a call at (877) 294-4419. Our experts will help make your campus safer and more secure today.

This article was developed by Facility Solutions Group (FSG), a member of the IM Supply distribution network. Based in Austin, Texas, FSG (www.fsg.com) has helped businesses and institutions of all sizes address lighting, electrical, signage, and technology challenges for nearly 40 years.