

MEMORANDUM

June 7, 2004

TO: Observers at McDonald Observatory

FROM: David L. Lambert, Director

SUBJECT: Policies regarding Daily Tours of 2.7 meter telescope and Public Viewing Night

McDonald Observatory is proud to provide the visiting public with rare opportunities to see a major research telescope up close. This note describes our policies regarding the daily tours of the 2.7 meter telescope and its use for the once-a-month public viewing night.

The Observatory wishes to remind you of the policies regarding public access to that telescope. Your research is our primary concern. The policies were conceived to minimize interference with your research and to maximize our ability to educate, inform, and entertain visitors to McDonald.

The Daily Tours

As part of the daily guided tours offered by the Observatory's Visitors Center, a guide will escort visitors onto the dome floor for roughly 45 minutes starting at, approximately, 12:00 p.m. and again at 3:00 p.m. Tours vary in size throughout the year. They average around 25-40 people, but may be as few as 1 or 2, or as many as the 100 person limit. School groups may also visit the telescope during the day at various times and are generally the same size as guided tours and receive similar treatment. As part of the tour experience, the guides (all trained Observatory personnel) have permission to:

- operate the platform floors
 - the floors are typically elevated no more than a foot or two
- move the telescope in both axes
 - ten or so degrees of motion is typically enough to demonstrate the telescope's motions
- rotate the dome
- open the dome for very brief periods
 - the dome is to be opened only in good weather, and only about a foot or two, and only when the opening is facing away from the Sun, and only for a few minutes at a time
- turn off the dome AC for the duration of the tour

In the event of work being conducted on the telescope at the time of the tour, guides have been instructed to perform only those demonstrations for which they are given specific permission at the time. Guides have also been instructed to abide by the "Do Not Move" sign when placed in front of the control panel even in the event that no one appears to be working on the telescope at the time.

If your observing project would be hindered by any of these demonstrations, please alert the Visitors Center staff by sending an email to vc@astro.as.utexas.edu with instructions as to which demonstrations you would prefer they not conduct.

The Public Viewing Night

The Observatory hosts a monthly viewing program on the 2.7 meter, typically on the Wednesday nearest the full moon. This program is conducted by the Visitors Center staff although you, as the observer for that night, will also be a host.

A member of the Visitors Center staff will contact you regarding this program. The program seats 40 and involves not only viewing two objects through the telescope but demonstrations by Visitors Center personnel and a short talk by you. Although the program is roughly 3 hours in duration, only about an hour of nighttime is used.

As part of this Viewing Night, Visitors Center staff will be moving the telescope to point to the two objects to be viewed during the observing portion of the program. If you have reservations about the Visitors Center staff moving the telescope, please let them know that you would prefer to do the pointing yourself.