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## Lighting the tower



The Tower is lit after a Womens Volleyball win Friday night over Minnesota.

**Photo Credit:** [Nathan Goldsmith](#) | Daily Texan Staff

### TAGS

[Neil Crump](#), [Steve Giannascoli](#)

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BY [BOBBY BLANCHARD](#)

After hours of work and preparation, there is some satisfaction for facilities staff members when the [UT Tower](#) lights up burnt orange or when the windows spell out a class' number. But there is also a sense of relief.

“It’s the satisfaction and relief all at once, because there is a lot of work that goes into making whatever it is that we’re doing,” construction services manager Neil Crump said.



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The Tower, which turned 75 earlier this year, has six different light configurations listed online which are used for a variety of events, ranging from Gone to Texas to commencement ceremonies. The University spends about \$3,000 in light maintenance and labor for the Tower and more than \$10,000 on electricity every year.

A total of 244 lamps light up the Tower. There is a control box in the clock room for the lights on the Tower's crown, the lights above the Tower's clock and the lights on the Tower's observation deck. There is another control box in what Crump calls a tiny closet on the eighth floor for the 68 lights on the main 10th-level shaft.

Electrician Steve Giannascoli said while it is only a flip of a switch to change the Tower's light settings, there is some stress on the job.

“When you have to light it on cue there is stress, because you have to switch it at the right moment,” Giannascoli said.

While flipping a switch is easy, Crump said most preparation time is put into making the windows show a number. Crump said three workers spend up to three hours together making sure the right windows are lit up and the right windows have their blinds closed. Before blinds were installed, it used to take even longer because paper would have to be taped onto windows.

In scenarios when the Tower has to be lit up exactly at the right moment, someone is manually at the control box waiting for the call. Giannascoli turned the Tower orange while UT's “Horns Up” commercial was being filmed. Someone in the helicopter filming the campus told him exactly when to flip the switch.

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But in other instances, the lighting can be done remotely. For example, when the Longhorns win a football game, Crump said someone will make a phone call and dial in a secret code to turn the Tower's top orange.

"It is top-secret, but it's not too complicated," Crump said. "You can do the whole operation in less than two minutes."

Giannascoli said he only knows four people who are aware of the digits that light up the Tower.

The President's office is the sole entity on campus that controls when and under what conditions the Tower is lit, but Crump said he will still get strange phone calls requesting special tower configurations.

"It is kind of comical. We will have people call in and say they need to turn the Tower orange for 30 minutes because they're going to propose in the South Mall," Crump said. "We get calls asking us to turn the Tower green for Saint Patrick's Day. The answer is no."

The Tower will also go dark in memoriam. For example, on the 10th anniversary of 9/11, the Tower was darkened for two days. The Tower was also darkened in 1999 after the Aggie Bonfire accident, which resulted in the deaths of 12 A&M students. Giannascoli said the Tower also gets turned off for a few hours on Earth Day.

The University will turn the Tower orange Friday to celebrate UT's birthday.

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