



Health Impacts

FROM TURBINES | Industry Spin vs. Fact

By Teddi Lovko, MD

The American Wind Energy Association and others in the wind industry have recently ramped up their efforts to convince Vermonters that large-scale wind turbines pose no problems for the communities near them. They would like you to believe that noise and health issues are not a problem.

Much of the information they are providing to back these claims are incomplete, misleading, and not surprisingly, interpreted with great bias.

They have chosen to ignore the problems people are having with wind turbines. Their experts reinterpret existing studies to suit their pre-formed conclusions. Instead of acknowledging the well-documented problems with noise, the industry discredits peoples' suffering by saying they are complaining because they don't like wind turbines, not because of legitimate noise problems.

The facts tell a different story.

Industry spin: *"There is no evidence that the audible or sub-audible sounds emitted by wind turbines have any direct adverse physiologic effects."*

FACTS:

■ The wind industry wants you to think that people are suffering no health or other ill effects from wind turbines. But in fact, their own experts acknowledge that there is a connection. Studies done on health impacts from turbines in the Netherlands and Sweden showed significant complaints of annoyance (with up to 50% annoyed at sound levels of 40dB or greater), and sleep disturbance (16% reported problems at outdoor modeled sound of 35DbA or greater). Other reported impacts include headaches, nausea, hypertension, and depression.

■ A Wisconsin survey of people living within a half mile of an industrial wind facility found that 33% suffered from at least one of the following: sleep loss, headache, nausea, and stress. And 25% said that their sleep was disturbed at least once a week.

■ A study being conducted of residents living near a large Maine wind facility shows significant complaints of chronic sleep disturbances and headaches, among other bodily complaints, and high incidences of depression in people living within 3,600 feet of the turbines, compared to a control group living within approximately one mile. There are hundreds of case reports of other people from all over the world suffering from similar noise-related complaints.

■ The fact that they do not acknowledge health issues and want to debate the meaning of the word "annoyance" says a lot about where the wind industry is coming from. In medicine we often look at Quality of Life as a measure of illness and health, and for the wind industry to not acknowledge that current guidelines are not protecting people is to ignore reality.

Industry spin: *"The sounds emitted by wind turbines are not unique."
"... wind turbines are no different, they don't require special treatment..."*

FACTS:

■ The wind industry loves to tell people how quiet wind turbines are and that therefore they cannot be the source of the complaints that people have. Once again the data and real life experience has shown that simply is not true. It has been clearly documented that wind turbine noise is not masked by ambient noise to any significant degree. Thus wind turbines quickly become an easily perceived sound, with about 80% of people hearing them even at 30dBA .

■ The industry loves to compare noise levels of turbines with other sources of noise, and to refer to relative sound levels. What they fail to point out is that the character of the noise is different. Studies clearly show that complaints of annoyance start at much lower sound levels for turbines and rise much more quickly than would be expected from other noise sources. People perceive wind turbine noise as much more disturbing than other sources of sound at comparable levels such as traffic, airplanes, etc.

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Industry spin: *“The sounds emitted by wind turbines are not unique.”
“... wind turbines are no different, they don’t require special treatment...”*

FACTS:

- There is something noteworthy going on when people have had to abandon their homes because of noise.
- There is every reason to believe that Vermonters will suffer from these same noise-related problems.

In fact, because a number of environmental factors which have been shown to increase the likelihood of increased noise levels and annoyance are present in Vermont—namely rough mountainous terrain, and quiet rural settings—the problems are likely to be worse.

Industry spin: *“Wind energy opponent[s] ... cite the claims of health problems at Mars Hill in Maine, but fail to mention the hundreds of wind farms around the nation where no such claims are made.”*

FACTS:

- The industry seems so sure of their presumptions that they declare that no further research is needed, and that any problems are isolated. These claims are made despite the fact that numerous studies, including ones they are citing, make it very clear that noise is the single factor that most clearly correlates with complaints of negative impacts from industrial wind facilities. These studies also recommend doing further research on the problems people are experiencing around wind turbines.
- A survey in Wisconsin showed that 30% of those hosting a turbine would not do so again. 75% of sites in Maine with industrial wind turbines have had problems with noise, annoyance, and health impacts. Even a cursory review of public documents uncovers complaints regarding annoyance from wind turbines and their noise in Oregon, Texas, Missouri, North

Dakota, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, New York, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, and Sweden.

- Recent events in Vinalhaven, Maine should do much to convince people that it is noise and not attitudes which are the problem. In this town where three 1.5 MW turbines were almost unanimously approved by residents, noise complaints began as soon as the turbines came on line. One family has had to abandon their house. The community as a whole is struggling with the noise and negative impacts of the turbines.
- The developer promised the community there would be no noise impacts. Now, people are wondering how to make things right again in the once-peaceful community.



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We achieve our mission by researching, collecting, and analyzing information from all sources; and disseminating it to the public, community leaders, legislators, media and regulators for the purpose of ensuring informed decisions for long term stewardship of our communities.