

Opinion: Turbines' effect on health is underestimated

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The state should not permit new wind farms until studies of their harmful effects are complete.

As physicians and clinicians, it is our foremost duty to do no harm. Therefore, we think it's reasonable to adopt the best practices of jurisdictions with decades of experience with wind power, and slow the permitting of such projects in Maine until health regulations are in place.

France enacted regulations in 2006 that stipulated a level of 25 decibels should not be exceeded in the home; the World Health Organization recommends no industry should increase ambient daytime noise by five decibels and nighttime noise by three decibels. The WHO also recommends bedroom noise levels never exceed 30 decibels.

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As clearly demonstrated by post-construction measurements at Mars Hill, the model used by the wind industry for that project was seriously flawed. Among other things, it seems to have disregarded the effects of multiple turbines in a linear arrangement perpendicular to residential neighborhoods.

It also ignores low frequency noise, even though low frequencies travel much longer distances and correlate with turbine-related health effects, particularly sleep disturbance, and all the negatives that flow from that fundamental ill effect.

We reasonably conclude the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Health and Human Services are currently unprepared and largely unaware of noise and health issues related to wind factories. We should all agree on the need to ensure that additional citizens shouldn't suffer the results as those Mars Hill residents who live within 3,500 feet of the turbines.

Also, in this regard, we note there is no research about effects on residents living between 3,500 feet and 1.25 miles or so from turbines. As such, we cannot state what distance ill effects might abate, if they do within that range. **Sound regulations in European jurisdictions therefore effectively result in setbacks of between one to 1.5 miles, depending upon the topography.**

We state with some confidence that ill effects are likely when homes are placed within 3,500 feet of a ridgeline arrangement of turbines. Ridgeline placements seem to be the prevalent pattern of turbine placement the industry would like to impose upon Maine.

It is logical for us to expect the state regulatory agencies to familiarize themselves as soon as possible with the relevant physics and physiology, and put appropriate setback regulations in effect before additional turbines are placed.

We note the DEP, in its variance regarding Mars Hill, described the allowance to 50 decibels as creating noise "similar to songbirds." This speaks to the lack of understanding of the nature of sound and a failure to appreciate that a decibel level alone is just one component of a sound's makeup.

One can no more describe sound by decibel level than describe a Van Gogh painting by saying "it is blue."

If poor outcomes such as Mars Hill are to be avoided, it is necessary to stop the "gold rush" mentality that relies on faulty wind modeling currently endorsed by projects, which have been rubberstamped by the DEP and the Land Use Regulatory Commission.

Furthermore, the state must have means to not only check for compliance, but also enforce compliance with credible threats to ensure it, including orders to stop turbine rotation and remove noncompliant turbines where and when necessary. We're concerned DEP is not up to this task, given recent statements about being overburdened.

There are many issues that need to be worked out. A moratorium is logical, unless we quickly move to adopt more stringent European and Australian standards.

Otherwise, the state's failure to act responsibly on this issue is the equivalent of abandoning its responsibility to protect public health, which would leave the people with few options other than seeking remedy and redress through the courts.

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