Canadian Audiologist

The Official Publication of the Canadian Academy of Audiology

Don’t Buy the Hype: Wind Turbines Do Not Impact Human Health

Published May 12th, 2015

Editor’s Note: Today’s post, by Gabe Elsner, is in response to the 3-part series on the Adverse Health Effects of Wind Turbines, by Jerry Punch, Ph.D. & Richard James, INCE, BME. Mr. Elsner was invited to share his opposing views on the controversial subject of the health impact from industrial wind turbines.[1]

Opponents of wind farms have worked to stop the development of wind energy by claiming that it negatively impacts human health. However, courts across the globe have dismissed claims that wind turbines harm human health, repeatedly finding that there is no reliable evidence showing wind farms make people sick. The supposed evidence cited by Jerry Punch and Richard James fails to prove anything, and instead relies on flawed analysis by anti-wind campaigners claiming to be health experts.

In addition, governments in Canada, Australia, and the United States concluded in separate studies that wind turbines do not cause negative human health impacts.

A report released by the Energy and Policy Institute documents how health impacts claims by wind energy opponents have been soundly rejected in court. We studied court cases related to wind farms and health in the United States, Canada, Australia, the British Isles, and New Zealand. Out of the 49 cases that considered claims that wind turbines cause health impacts, courts dismissed 48 as lacking reliable evidence. Since 1998, 48 court rulings in five countries concluded that wind farms pose no threat to human health. The sole outlier is an instructive but unique case in which a turbine had a malfunction when originally installed, causing it to be noisier than usual. The judge in the Falmouth Wind Farm Case accepted medical claims by the complainants at face value, but there is no documentation that any medical experts were brought in as witnesses in the case to corroborate the claims.

Evidence Overwhelmingly Points Against Claims

Governments in Australia, Canada, and the United States studied peer-reviewed scientific research and also concluded that wind farms to do not cause negative impacts to human health.
The Australian National Health and Medical Research Council stated, “There are no direct pathological effects from wind farms and that any potential impact on humans can be minimised [sic] by following existing planning guidelines.” The Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in Canada reported, “the scientific evidence available to date *does not* demonstrate a direct causal link between wind turbine noise and adverse health effects.” And finally, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection concluded, “There is no evidence for a set of health effects, from exposure to wind turbines, that could be characterized as “Wind Turbine Syndrome” and also stated (among other conclusions), “strongest epidemiological study suggests that there is *not* an association between noise from wind turbines and measures of psychological distress or

mental health problems."

Put simply, governments around the globe have concluded in comprehensive reviews of peer-reviewed research: wind turbines *do not* cause human health impacts.

Finally, Punch and James cite inexpert "experts" and flawed anecdotal research to claim that wind turbines do cause negative impacts to human health. Over the past several years, anti-wind campaigners without credentials or relevant experience have attempted to serve as expert witnesses in civil suits, Environmental Review Tribunals (ERT) in Canada, and Environmental Resources and Development (ERD) proceedings in Australia.[2]

In total, E&PI has documented that 16 frequently-cited anti-wind campaigners and their testimony were dismissed by courts due to lack of relevant expertise.

Questionable 'Expert' Claims

Nina Pierpont self-published a book, coining the phrase "Wind Turbine Syndrome." Since then, 22 literature reviews on wind turbine health and many point-specific studies on wind turbine noise, vibration, infrasound, and shadow flicker, conducted by public health doctors and scientists, acousticians, epidemiologists, and related specialists considered Pierpont's book along with other published literature. In every case, they found that her work was lacking in credibility. Recent major reviews have been conducted in Ontario, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Australia with the same results. In a 2013 wind farm hearing in Ontario, her book and testimony was dismissed for lack of expertise in the areas of "brain and ear physiology and pathophysiology, population-level studies in free-living organisms and medical interviewing."

Dr. Carl Phillips is also presented as an expert witness at wind development planning hearings, but prior to performing anti-wind work he was a fixture in courtrooms related to tobacco health suits. Following his academic career, Phillips then set up his own research foundation and has attempted to counter peer-reviewed research, specifically regarding wind turbines. In a late 2013 court case related to the Bull Creek Wind Project, Phillips was dismissed because he "provided little rationale for his predictions," "his conclusions were not based upon any particular adverse event reports," and "the data he looked at was not organized in a systematic way and he did not break down the data to determine a dose-response relationship between wind turbine operation and the symptoms he described."

Don't Buy Into the Hype

In conclusion, Punch and James have made unsubstantiated claims and have not provided unbiased evidence from legitimate experts. Meanwhile courts and governments in countries around the world have concluded that wind farms do not harm human health. In courtrooms and in comprehensive, peer-reviewed studies, governments and courts have rejected the claims made by anti-wind campaigners. Punch & James' recent series, Adverse Health Effects of Industrial Wind Turbines, is unsubstantiated and not supported by credible evidence or scientific research, and their continued efforts to attack wind energy should be properly labeled anti-wind propaganda.

Footnotes

1. Punch & James provide their response to Mr. Elsner's claims in the comments below?
2. See: Energy & Policy Institute?