

## Wind turbine safety questioned

Jun 15, 2011 - McClatchy-Tribune Regional News - Patrick Cassidy Cape Cod Times, Hyannis, Mass.

Studies on the health effects of wind energy projects around the world are a work-in-progress, but for two medical doctors who have researched the issue in Australia, North America and Europe the evidence points to potential problems.

"You certainly do have a hot spot for wind here on Cape Cod," said author and pediatrician Nina Pierpont at the start of her webcast presentation at a forum Tuesday night on the health effects of wind turbines.

The event, sponsored by Windwise-Cape Cod, a group organized in opposition to wind energy projects near Cape neighborhoods, drew about 40 people to a lecture hall at Cape Cod Community College. The gathering included a handful of wind energy proponents.

Pierpont's book, "Wind Turbine Syndrome: A Report on a Natural Experiment," is considered a seminal text by opponents of wind turbines concerned with health effects from the machines.

Her study of 10 families living near wind turbines contradicts the long-held assumption that if something can't be heard then it can't hurt, Pierpont said.

The wind industry and public health officials have used a so-called A-weighted measurement of sound that does not include certain types of sound wind turbines emit, she said.

Wind energy advocates argue that Pierpont's study is flawed and her sample size inadequate. "I've been criticized a lot for not having done an epidemiological study," Pierpont said.

Instead of using the more comprehensive methodology for studying public health problems, Pierpont used case studies based on people living near wind turbines and experiencing health issues.

Pierpont didn't have the resources to do an epidemiological study, but she said a pattern emerged that showed similar risk factors among the people she interviewed who experienced severe symptoms associated with living near turbines. The symptoms include sleeplessness, headaches, tinnitus, and eye and ear pressure, she said.

All but one of the 10 families she studied moved out of their homes, abandoning them or selling them for a loss, she said.

"This has happened to hundreds of people around the globe," she said.

The solution to these problems is to increase the distance between homes and turbines, Pierpont said. For turbines up to 2 megawatts in size, the setbacks should be at least 1 1/4 miles, she said, adding that other larger turbines may require as much as a 6-mile setback.

Sarah Laurie, an Australian doctor who has conducted a series of interviews and collected information on health problems associated with wind turbines, agreed with Pierpont that setbacks are probably the only real solution.

In addition to a long list of other health problems, irritability, extreme anger and potentially life-threatening depression have been seen in wind farm workers and neighbors of wind turbines, Laurie said. "This desperation that people have is just sometimes awful," Laurie said during her webcast presentation.

Liz Argo, a longtime wind energy advocate and president of the Cape and Islands Wind Energy Network who attended the forum, said Pierpont should not be faulted for raising a flag but rather for coining the term "wind turbine syndrome," which isn't based on any clear data. "It wasn't a broad random selection and it didn't have a baseline," Argo said of Pierpont's study. "She sought these people out who were having problems."

Argo's interviews of people who live around wind turbines in various locations showed no complaints, she said. Still, Argo said, more studies are required on the effects of low frequency sound and infrasound from wind turbines.

State officials are forming an expert scientific panel to study the health effects from wind turbines and accepting public comment on the issue until June 30.