

# "The Dark Side of Wind Power"

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Noise may not be your first concern when considering whether or not to support wind power development in your community, but, for neighbors to wind turbines, it is tormenting.

Dave Pevec, who lives more than a quarter-mile from the Waymart wind power plant in rural Pennsylvania, complains at a public meeting that the noise keeps him awake at night. **"It sounds like an airport ... my peace is gone forever."** Lou Orehek, whose relatives live nearby, writes, **"It is the opinion of members of my family that the windmills generate a low frequency 'grind' ... and this noise travels more than 7,000 feet."**

In New York, Pastor Kathleen Danley lives two good-sized fields from the Fenner wind power plant, and describes the noise to a reporter as **"a loud clothes dryer; that would probably be the closest sound, that constant turning sound."** She explains in a frustrated letter to her local newspaper, **"We were told that the windmills had been redesigned so as not to be noisy, but the grinding noise goes on 24 hours a day (when they are operating) and at times is far worse than other times."**

In Michigan, Kelly Alexander lives a quarter-mile from the Mackinaw City turbines. **The low-frequency sound creates a drumming that penetrates the walls of his home. Even with doors and windows tightly closed, there is no way to escape it. His 80-year-old mother lives next door. The noise keeps her awake at night.**

In West Virginia, Paula Stahl describes in a letter a hike up to the Mountaineer turbines (installed spring 2003). **"The noise was incredible. It surprised me. It sounded like airplanes or helicopters. And it traveled. Sometimes you could not hear the sound standing right under one, but you heard it 3,000 yards down the hill, where the wind carried the sound."**

Waymart and Fenner have 1.5-megawatt General Electric turbines. The Mountaineer turbines are the same size. The Mackinaw turbines are slightly smaller.

Sunlight strobing through spinning wind-turbine blades also distresses neighbors. A homeowner near the Lincoln wind power plant in Wisconsin responds to a survey by complaining, **"When the sun is setting, it shines through the blades, causing severe flashing in our house."** Another neighbor says, **"We get a 'strobe effect' throughout our house and over our entire property (40 acres)."** Others add, **"shadows are cast over the ground and affect my balance,"** and **"shadows from the blades sweep over our house and yard and ruin our quality of life."**

Physical reactions can be pronounced. In England, where the effects of wind power plants have been widely documented, Dave Brierley, a former policeman living in Cumbria, tells a reporter, **"I live 1,000 meters south of the wind farm and my wife, who is asthmatic, gets very distressed when the wind is coming from the north because she can feel her breathing trying to synchronize with the thump of the blades."**

A newspaper article titled *Wind farms 'make people sick who live up to a mile away'* reports on the findings of Amanda Harry, M.D.: **All but one of 14 people living near a wind power plant in Cornwall have experienced increased numbers of headaches, and 10 say that they have had problems sleeping and suffered from anxiety. She says, "People demonstrated a range of symptoms from headaches, migraines, nausea, dizziness, palpitations and tinnitus to sleep disturbance, stress, anxiety and depression."**

People living near wind turbines aren't the only ones affected. Federal law requires most turbines to be fitted with constantly flashing lights, and they can be seen for miles. One observer of the Waymart facility describes **"the multitude of red blinking aircraft warning lights that now trace across the ridge top at night."** Others see those turbines 10 to 15 miles away. **Of the Montfort wind power plant in Wisconsin, a person writes, "You see them from far away, lights and all."** The Fenner turbines can be seen 25 miles away.

What about the effect on property values? **Despite claims by wind power supporters that turbines have no depressive effect on nearby home sales, there's a lot of evidence to the contrary in areas where the landscape is the attraction.** At a public meeting on a proposed wind power plant in Lowell, Vermont, a realtor trying to sell a farm near the site tells a company representative his assertion that land values won't decrease is "ludicrous." **Don Maclure says that when he informs people interested in buying the farm about the proposed project he never hears from them again.**

**In England, newspaper articles highlight the problem with such titles as *Wind turbines made our home unsellable, Wind farms stunt growth of property value, and Potential losses could run into millions.*** Kyle Blue, a realtor in Cumbria, reports that when his company auctioned a farmhouse a half-mile from proposed turbines, it fetched nearly 30% less than its valuation before the plans were announced. Another farmhouse attracted a buyer who said the wind power plant wouldn't bother him because he was keen on renewable energy. "Then he went away, did some research and changed his mind," says Mr. Blue. In the Lake District, a judge ruled that a wind power plant reduced the value of a home 1,780 feet away by 20%.

**Typically, wind power developers target economically-stressed communities, and make all sorts of promises. Jobs? Wind power plants generally employ one or two full-time workers, depending on the number of turbines. During construction, most workers are brought in from elsewhere by the contractors, because specialized skills are required. Tax revenues? Ask the people in Waymart, Pennsylvania, who now find that the wind power company there is trying to redefine turbines from real property to equipment, and thus reduce its tax burden from more than \$1.3 million to less than \$30,000 annually, according to the calculations of outraged citizen Ray Vogt. Apparently, the town is afraid that if it objects, it will be sued.**

Wind power developers are not mom-and-pop operations. **They are huge corporations that have figured out they can make extraordinary amounts of money off the public purse, and have hired lots of lobbyists to make sure the money keeps flowing. A wind-industry lawyer said two-thirds of the value of these projects is in the tax benefits. In other words, corporations make more money off the tax breaks and other perks than from selling the electricity. One of the leaders in wind energy, FPL Group, had profits of \$3.36 billion from 2001 through 2003, and paid just 0.4 percent of that in state income taxes. Those tax breaks mean more taxes paid by the rest of us.**

**The only real beneficiaries of wind power plants are the investors and the landowners who lease the property. If you want to find out what neighbors to these facilities really think, go on the internet and do searches. We have a lot of information and links at <[www.GreenBerkshires.org](http://www.GreenBerkshires.org)>. Make sure the people you contact aren't leasing land to the companies [or employed by the companies, as in Fenner, NY], or haven't been silenced with confidentiality agreements (yes, that's happening - complaining neighbors are reluctantly accepting payments to be quiet because they can't sell their properties, and can't afford to sue.) Look for ordinary neighbors, and you will find out what it's like to have these wind power plants near your home. And, by the way, when you're making up your mind about wind power plants, notice where they're not being built: People in wealthy communities support them, just not in their back yards.**

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