

'Annoyance' factor exists

Posted By PETER EPP, SUN MEDIA

Chatham Daily News, April 2009

original link: <http://www.chathamdailynews.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1525667>

Dr. David Colby doesn't doubt that some people are bothered by the noise generated by a wind turbine, but the acting medical officer of health for Chatham-Kent says there's no direct link between wind turbine noise and health problems.

Colby, speaking to the Rotary Club of Chatham on Wednesday, said research he's read suggests there are no health problems that can be directly attributed to wind turbines and their function.

But he acknowledges that some people might find turbines to be "annoying" and that annoyance could create stress that might lead to an illness.

"But it's a subjective quality," he said. "I'm not denying that some people are really bothered by the noise." Colby last year was asked by Chatham-Kent council to examine the health problems that could be possibly attributed to turbines and their function, and he concluded there are none. His report has since been referenced across Canada, and last week CBC television said Colby is the nation's foremost expert on wind turbines and health problems.

But Colby told Rotarians that he's not an expert and that he's never conducted any of his own research on the subject. But he did conduct an investigation into existing research before drawing his conclusion.

"I'm not a spokesman for wind energy, and I don't have an axe to grind. I'm not in anybody's pocket. I was simply asked to develop a report and a conclusion, and I did that."

Colby said he examined five potential causes of health problems arising from wind turbine function, but determined that none offer a public health menace. They include turbine failure, icing, sound emissions, shadow flicker and construction concerns.

On the issue of turbine failure, he said 68,000 of the units have been built globally and there have been few if any examples of failure. In Ontario, there have been none.

In regard to icing, however, Colby said the potential exists for ice to fall from moving turbine blades, "and they could be thrown a considerable distance."

He said there have been some reports in Europe of people being hit by falling ice, but said the incidents are so few that the potential can't be considered a public health worry. He added that setback requirements are in place to help reduce such concerns.

Colby said sound and noise concerns are the biggest issues, but are frequently misunderstood. He said anti-turbine "activists" often use sound and noise terms incorrectly to "justify their beliefs," but the terms are used incorrectly.