



Thursday, June 23rd, 2011 | Posted by [Rick Conroy](#)

Science

Beware of folks who come to tell you the end of the world is near—they are inevitably trying to sell you something. While Harold Camping’s Judgment Day prediction, for May 21, didn’t pan out quite the way he figured, the U.S. radio preacher was lucky enough to fall back on about \$80 million in donations he’d collected from his believers over the past few years.

And so it was that John Bennett came to Picton last week—predicting doom and selling windmills.

Bennett is the executive director of Sierra Club Canada. The Sierra Club is an old and well-established environmental advocacy group, but one that is increasingly at odds with other nature and conservancy groups lately over its staunch defence of industrial wind factories and their developers in the face of growing harm to humans, animals and habitat. (See story page 11.)

Even Harold Camping or Al Gore would have blushed at Bennett’s hyperbole. Speaking with the hubris and certainty only snake oil salesmen can muster, Bennett sounded the alarm—warning council that climate change was the “greatest environmental threat the world has ever seen” and “on par with nuclear war.”

Then without missing a beat, and seemingly missing the irony in his own words, he proclaimed himself a man of science. “Without science all is lost,” Bennett offered breathlessly. “If we are going to have a debate about science it should be based on science and fact.”

Yet he offered no evidence. No science. No fact. All the committee got was opinion. One man’s viewpoint.

Bennett explained that his organization has reviewed the available literature and concluded that industrial wind turbines are safe, IF they are sited properly. Unfortunately he didn’t offer any advice, or specifications, about what “sited properly” means to him. The man of science was suddenly at a loss for precision or objective measure.

In fairness, Bennett wasn't allowed to answer questions from the committee and perhaps that question might have come up. But for all his insistence on science, it was rather an important point to gloss over.

Asked after the meeting if the Sierra Club's inability to find direct evidence of harm caused by wind turbines was the same thing as saying wind turbines don't make people sick, Bennett emphatically assured this reporter it was.

"Absolutely, it means the same thing," said Bennett.

Are we really at the end of knowledge? Do we really know everything there is to know about industrial wind factories and their effects on humans and other creatures?

DDT was used widely to control mosquitoes for four decades—most folks thought it to be safe and effective. Their government told them so. Yet even in the early '40s some were warning of hazards with the chemical. It took another 30 years to ban its use.

Dr. Bob McMurtry hasn't said that industrial wind turbines are safe or unsafe. He and other physicians continue to document and monitor cases of sickness and health problems associated with these machines. They are on the front lines of the assault of rural Ontario by industrial wind developers.

McMurtry's position—and that of many other groups, organizations, municipalities and individuals—is that the onus is on the government to prove industrial wind turbines are safe before inflicting them upon rural residents. They want, simply, an epidemiological study conducted in this province to assure residents that wind factories won't put their health, or their children's health, at risk.

This is a reasonable, science-based expectation. A review of literature tells you only what has been learned to date. It tells you nothing about the type, relevance, quality or comprehensiveness of the investigation that has been conducted so far. It is like sending your child to the fridge for milk and when he comes back empty-handed, accepting that you are all out because he couldn't find it. The milk was there he just couldn't see it—or chose not to.

But set all this aside—when someone comes to your door telling you the end of times is near and they are offering salvation in the form of a product—shouldn't we insist that they demonstrate how their product will help us avert doom?

Shouldn't they be compelled to show us how erecting thousands, nay millions of turbines, will fix climate change? Opposing wind turbines, and the policies that underpin their proliferation across the Great Lakes horizon, isn't an argument for the status quo; it is, however, a demand that we invest in science and fact—rather than snake oil and doomsday predictions.

rick@wellingtontimes.ca