

Wind turbines make people sick: professor

Havas, who studies environmental toxicology at the university in Peterborough, has added her voice to the call by Dawn-Euphemia Township council and others who want Ontario to study the impact of the growing number of wind generation projects sprouting up across the province. "Why would you want to put a lot of these wind turbines near people, have some percentage of them get sick, and then have to deal with that afterwards?" Havas asked.

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Trent University professor Magda Havas believes Ontario should study the impact wind turbines have on the health of people living near them.

Havas, who studies environmental toxicology at the university in Peterborough, has added her voice to the call by Dawn-Euphemia Township council and others who want Ontario to study the impact of the growing number of wind generation projects sprouting up across the province.

"Why would you want to put a lot of these wind turbines near people, have some percentage of them get sick, and then have to deal with that afterwards?" Havas asked.

"It doesn't make sense."

Havas said that while she's in favour of renewable energy, "one of the things I'm concerned about is that in places where they've put wind turbines, the people living around them are getting sick."

Sound waves caused by wind turbines are one of the reasons, Havas said.

Some of the waves can be heard and create a "rhythmic kind of noise pollution that drives people crazy," much like a dripping tap, she said.

But, turbines also create sound at a low frequency that can't be heard. These waves can "cause different organs in our body to vibrate sympathetically," Havas said.

"That's one of the things that's making people sick."

The answer to that problem, Havas said, is to determine how far wind turbines should be placed away from people's homes to eliminate the impact.

She said a 2006 report by the French National Academy of Medicine recommended a minimum distance of 1.5 km. "Other people are suggesting 2 km as a safety factor."

That's much farther than the 400 to 600-metre setbacks seen in Ontario, Havas said.

The second reason wind turbines are a concern, she said, is that they, like solar energy projects, can generate “dirty electricity” when converting power from a direct current to an alternating current.

“Our research shows that it’s making people ill,” Havas said. “We know that because when we clean it up in a home, the illnesses we’ve been studying go away.”

Dirty electricity is something utility companies are also concerned about because it can damage their equipment, she said.

Dirty electricity can also flow as stray voltage along the ground, creating problems for humans and farm animals, Havas said.

That kind of ground current has been found near wind turbines in Ripley, Ont., where some people living in the area reported feeling sick, she said.

“They’re trying to filter it but they haven’t been successful at getting it all cleaned up.”

Havas said Ontario should insist wind turbines are designed to eliminate that type of impact on people living nearby.

While pursuing sources of green energy is important, Havas said, it shouldn’t be done without the proper testing.

“That’s true for anything,” she said, “even something as potentially beneficially as renewable energy.”