

Commentary on “The Health Impact of Wind Turbines: A Review of the Current White, Grey, and Published Literature”. Chatham Kent Public Health Unit. June 2008

R.Y. McMurtry MD, FRCSC FACS

This work is a literature review. There is no original research that has been reported in the document. As a literature review it is weak. For example mention is made of Nina Pierpont or her case reports of 10 families. The writer then declines to attach any significance to do this work – surprising behavior for a public health official or public health unit. Furthermore the writer does not reference her in the bibliography. No mention is made of Amanda Harry, a physician who has done important work and reported another case series of adverse health events she indicated were related to wind turbines. No mention is made of the Portuguese researchers Alves Perreira and Castello Blanco. Their work on vibro-acoustic disease (VAD) has been ongoing for nearly 30 years and they have linked VAD to wind turbines.

What the writer does do is to quote wind industry sources 26 times (out of 83 citations). This is unusual as the paper has been written for a municipal government and purports to be neutral about the health impact of wind turbines.

Another omission of concern is the consigning of the work of Frey and Haddon to “Additional Resources” rather than referencing it in the article. It is a comprehensive and scholarly work on the subject. Thus while omitting important literature the writer construes the absence of evidence as a definitive answer when it is not. When case reports and case series are reported by responsible physicians it sounds a cautionary note.

Errors of commission also occur. Quoting H.G. Leventhall and his paper “Infrasound from Wind Turbines – Fact, Fiction or Deception” (citation #54) is appropriate. Quoting him selectively is not. Leventhall discounts low frequency noise as an issue which is controversial and not supported by the neurological literature. However he goes on to point out that “Attention should be focused on the audio frequency fluctuating swish, which some people may well find to be very disturbing and stressful, depending on its level.”

At minimum uncertainty exists. When that is the case it is an obligation of public health authorities to address the issue. For example an epidemiological study of the people surrounding wind turbine installations would be a step in creating authoritative guidelines. That is precisely what many have asked for, including the Academy of Medicine of France, and that is a well-designed epidemiological study to refute or confirm the presence of adverse health events. The writer neglects to quote this recommendation as well. Another simpler option is a survey of people living near existing wind turbine installations. No such advice is found in the recommendations.

In short this is a paper that would not be accepted in a responsible peer review journal. The transgressions of confirmation bias and the failure to quote relevant literature are

fundamental errors. This paper is not an authoritative contribution to the literature regarding wind turbines. Finally as a public health document it is seriously deficient.

R.Y.McMurtry M.D. FRCSC FACS

According to the Chatham Kent website the presentation of this work was made by Dr. David Colby

www.chatham-kent.ca/NR/rdonlyres/CA6E8804-D6FF-42A5-B93B-5229FA127875/7104/July212008.pdf

This article was originally published by Wind Concerns Ontario, at:

<http://windconcernsontario.wordpress.com/2009/02/03/commentary-on-%E2%80%9Cthe-health-impact-of-wind-turbines-a-review-of-the-current-white-grey-and-published-literature%E2%80%9D-chatham-kent-public-health-unit-june-2008/>

But WOC sometimes moves things around, so I copied it to amherstislandwindinfo.com so it would always be available. You can get the latest version of this article by visiting WOC's home page, searching for "health" and looking for the appropriate link. Also, moving the links from the original html to a MS word doc to PDF is problematical and you may have to "copy and paste" the links as opposed to just clicking on them.