

Wisconsin Wind Turbines Declared Health Hazard

First of its kind ruling; similar to Michigan situation

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By [JACK SPENCER](#) | Nov. 8, 2014



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In what appears to be the first of its kind ruling in the United States, the Board of Health in Brown County, Wisconsin, where Green Bay is located, has declared a local industrial wind plant to be a human health hazard. The specific facility consists of eight 500-foot high, 2.5 megawatt industrial wind turbines.

The board [made its finding](#) with a 4-0 vote (three members were not present) at an Oct. 14 meeting after it had wrestled with health complaints about the wind plant for more than four years. Ultimately, the board's ruling was based on a year-long survey which documented health complaints and demonstrated that infrasound and low-frequency noise emanating from the turbines was detectable inside homes within a 6.2-mile radius of the industrial wind plant.

Jay Tibbetts, a physician and a member of the Brown County Board of Health, said the board based its position that the turbines constitute a health hazard on the weight of evidence.

"I can tell you that we are absolutely not an anti-wind energy board," Tibbetts said. "We worked on this for four and a half years before making this decision. Three families have moved out. I knew all of them. We also know that this isn't only happening here. In Ontario 40 families have abandoned their homes to get away from the effects of wind turbines."

According to Tibbetts, micro barometers were placed in homes located in the area surrounding the industrial wind plant. The purpose of this was to detect acoustic emissions, including infrasound and low frequency noise emanating from the turbines.

“They found that there were tones of infrasound and low frequency noise as far away as 6.2 miles from the nearest wind turbine,” Tibbetts said. “There were no complaints associated with the home that was 6.2 miles away, but there were complaints associated with one 4.2 miles away.

“We have 80 people on record who have made health complaints, including a nurse who is going deaf,” Tibbetts continued. “We can’t just ignore this.”

Brown County’s health code defines a human health hazard as “a substance, activity or condition that is known to have the potential to cause acute or chronic illness or death if exposure to the substance, activity or condition is not abated.”

The Board of Health’s Oct. 14 decision could potentially put Duke Energy — which operates and owns the wind plant — in a position where it has to prove the turbines are not the cause of the health complaints. Duke Energy, a sustainable electric and gas company with approximately 7.2 million U.S. customers in the Southeast and Midwest, did not build the plant, it purchased it.

Those who defend the safety of wind turbines argue that infrasound and low-frequency noise can also be detected miles away from other sources, such as traffic and large bodies of water. They claim the ill-effects residents complain about could be psychological (based on an anticipation of being adversely impacted) and there is no scientific proof that turbines make people sick.

Tammie McGee, spokesperson for Duke Energy, said the wind plant is the only one owned by the company that has received health complaints. She also said that Duke Energy has a good track record for responding to complaints and has, so far, received no notification or other form of communication from the Brown County Board of Health.

“Duke Energy has more than 1,000 wind turbines,” McGee said. “The wind development in Brown County, which is in complete compliance with (local) ordinances, has only eight turbines and it is the only one we have where there are complaints from neighbors.

“We have heard nothing from the Brown County Board of Health,” McGee added. “Over the three weeks since Oct. 14, we have not been able to get anything from them — including being able to find the minutes of the meeting on their (the County’s) website.”

Tibbetts said the Oct. 14 meeting was public and it wasn’t the board’s responsibility to see to it that a representative of Duke Energy was present. However, there are indications that (possibly for legal

reasons) board members, other than Tibbetts, have not been making themselves available to the press for comment.

Rick James, of Lansing-based E-Coustic Solutions, is an acoustic engineer. He conducted the Brown County survey.

“The County has a responsibility to protect the health of the public from entities that are emitting things that are toxic; and that includes substances or noise,” James said. “The wind plant has been studied and studied. The micro barometers confirmed that the wind turbine tones propagated out about four miles and that there were complaints that could be linked to that data.

“As I understand it, the board could have declared the wind plant to be a hazard of a higher level,” James said. “They didn’t do that. However, I believe what they did puts the burden of proof on Duke Energy.”

Tibbetts said the board’s decision has received much news media coverage.

“It’s worldwide,” Tibbetts said. “It’s been covered as far away as Australia.”

What about the regular news media in the United States?

“Not much,” Tibbetts said. “I don’t think the average person in the United States hears anything about this issue. For some reason the news media doesn’t seem to want to cover it. But I did get a call from someone at NBC. I think that was in the context of what’s been going on in [Massachusetts](#). It was picked up by some affiliates. But for the most part, I don’t think a lot of the people in this county have heard very much about any of this. It took our local Green Bay Gazette almost two weeks to do the story.”

Brown County is across Lake Michigan from Mason County, where health complaints allegedly caused by the Lake Winds industrial wind plant, near Ludington, resulted in both a [civil lawsuit](#) and Mason County declaring that the wind plant was not in compliance with the County noise ordinance.

“What’s happening in Wisconsin is consistent with results we are seeing on the ground in the Garden Peninsula and Huron, Tuscola, Missaukee, Mason and even Gratiot counties,” said Kevon Martis, director of the Interstate Informed Citizens Coalition, a nonprofit [organization](#) that is concerned about the construction of wind turbines in the region.

“What is pathetic is that wind developers could offer to relocate people outside the footprint of most developments for \$3 million to \$5 million,” Martis continued. “When the total capital costs of a wind development are \$200 to \$300 million, such a cost to protect our rural citizens is barely a blip on the balance sheet. And in most cases the wind developer is playing with public funds in the first place.”

James was asked if there were many other situations involving health issues allegedly resulting from wind turbine-produced *infrasound and low frequency noise*.

“I mostly limit my travel to the Midwest,” James said. “However, I have gone to West Virginia, North Carolina, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Washington state, Vancouver, Australia and New Zealand. This stuff is happening all over.”

Tibbetts publicly opposed the wind plant before it was constructed and the Brown County Board of Health had previously asked the state of Wisconsin to intervene in the situation. In January of 2013, the Wisconsin Towns Association called for a moratorium on construction of new wind turbines.