

Living with the negative effects of wind turbines

[Aug 24, 2011 Staff](#)

By Barbara Draper

Ohio, Ill., resident

I live 1 mile from the city limits of Ohio, Ill., in Bureau County on the Big Sky Wind farm, which covers approximately 13 square miles, more or less. In that area, there are at least 56 turbines, and 30 are on land owned by absentee landowners who do not have the negative effects of shadow flicker, poor TV reception or noise.

In that same 13-square-mile area, there are 47 homes, excluding those in the Village of Ohio. Ten of those homes belong to and are lived in by people who have turbines on their farm. The other 37 homes are owned and occupied by residents who are not participating in the wind farm.

We are among those 36 nonparticipating homes because we chose not to have a turbine on our farm, as did two other farmers in our area. However, most of those 36 homes are on small rural estates, and they had no choice for a turbine.

We have 12 turbines located around our house that vary in distance from less than a quarter-of-a-mile to three located less than a mile. There is no window in our home to look out without seeing turbine blades going round and round. I have taken pictures from my windows, if anyone is interested in looking at them.

As we sit on our patio, we are looking at 31 turbines spinning. The sound is a monotonous sound of whish, whish that can vary in intensity and, at times, has sounded like a train rumbling down a track. I refer to it as irritating, like a dripping faucet. It just never stops, unless the turbine is not running.

The beautiful countryside in our area has disappeared, along with the quiet and peaceful county living we once had.

We have shadow flicker many months of the year, from 15 minutes to more than an hour a day, whenever the sun is shining and turbines are running.

At a meeting before Big Sky was built, I asked about shadow flicker. The developer said I would have flicker for maybe two to three seconds a year. I should have had him write his statement down and sign it. My suggestion is that if a developer tells you something, have him sign a written statement to that effect.

Some mornings, we don't need an alarm, because the flicker wakes us up. This fall, we will again have the most intense flicker starting in October and until the end of February. This comes from a turbine 1,620 feet (according to Big Sky measurements) southwest of our house.

The flicker is in every room in our house — we can't get away from it. When we first experienced this, we thought something was wrong with our lights, but as our eyes kept moving to find the source — we just couldn't figure it out. I then walked into the kitchen, and it was coming through the closed venetian blind — then we knew. That flicker lasted an hour. It made my husband feel ill, like motion sickness. The brighter the sun, the more intense the flicker.

This flicker is hard to explain to people. Flickering fluorescent lights in every room might be similar; however, they would not cast moving light on the walls and furniture.

This flicker comes through trees, blinds or lined drapes. Light-blocking shades would have to be sealed to the sides of the window.

The shadows are on our buildings, our lawn and across our field. Last fall, I covered the tops of my south windows with wide aluminum foil. I did this so I could look outside a few windows without seeing rotating blades. It didn't keep out the flicker. I have now replaced the foil with pleated shades.

The Bureau County Zoning Board was told by a wind farm representative that 20 to 30 hours of shadow flicker a year was acceptable. It is not acceptable. I asked the representative if he lived on a wind farm. He answered, "No."

Residents, especially nonparticipating residents, should not have any flicker in their house or any shadow from turbines on their lawn, outbuildings or farm land. I have read that this is a trespass.

An executive of Big Sky told us on the phone that we had a serious shadow flicker problem. The next time we talked with her, she denied saying it — another reason to get their statements in writing and signed.

A person has to live on a wind farm 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to really know what it is like. You cannot get the whole effect by just driving through it and stopping by a turbine for a short time. The conditions vary, hour by hour, day by day, and even season to season.

When Big Sky first started erecting the turbines, my husband and daughter drove to one — they couldn't hear a thing. We thought, "Oh, this won't be so bad." One trip does not tell the story.

I realize wind farms are big money for participating farmers and tax-supported institutions. However, more consideration needs to be given in the placement of the turbines to eliminate what we are having in Big Sky.

We don't live in the quiet rural county anymore. It has been replaced with an industrial wind park. They call it a wind farm — wrong — it produces no food. It just eliminates many food-producing acres.

These counties need to realize the impact of turbines and make their ordinances to protect the people. Shadow flicker should not have to be tolerated by rural residents. It

is disturbing and has health consequences. I have been told that someone with seizures could not live in our home because of that intense flicker we have in the fall.

I also strongly believe no shadows from turbines should be cast across highways, as they are in Big Sky. Several drivers have told me they have been startled by them — slammed on their brakes, and some nearly ran off the road. I called the Illinois Department of Transportation, but was told they could do nothing as long as the turbine was not in their right of way — it was a county issue.

All of these problems are disturbing and serious problems, and there are health problems involved. I sometimes think this country has its priorities mixed up. I love nature and animals, but when a conservation area was given a farther setback from turbines in Lee County than we were given from our homes in Bureau County, I got disturbed.

I believe there needs to be much more study done on wind turbines before filling this nation's countryside with them. In making your ordinances, please make sure your residents are protected from the negative effects of turbines.

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