

Is Massachusetts the NIMBY Capital of the World? What Will Be the Impact of the Wind Turbine Health Impact Study?

January 18, 2012 by [Seth Jaffe](#)

Yesterday, the “Independent Expert Panel” convened by MassDEP to review whether wind turbines cause any adverse health effects issued [its report](#). I was pleased that the headline in the [Boston Globe](#) was that “Wind turbines don’t cause health problems.” Similarly, the [Daily Environment Report](#) headline was that “Massachusetts Study Finds ‘No Evidence’ of Health Impacts from Wind Turbines.”

I hope that that’s the way the report will be read, but I’m worried. Perhaps I just have too many NIMBY-related scars. Whatever the reason, I am worried about the report’s statements that there

“is limited epidemiologic evidence suggesting an association between exposure to wind turbines and annoyance.”

and that

“whether annoyance from wind turbines leads to sleep issues or stress has not been sufficiently quantified.”

and that there

“is limited scientific evidence of an association between annoyance from prolonged shadow flicker (exceeding 30 minutes per day) and potential transitory cognitive and physical health effects.”

Can’t you see opponents of wind turbines latching on to these statements and urging the MEPA office to require that wind project developers fill in these “data gaps” before being allowed to proceed in Massachusetts? So climate change is threatening life as we know it (allow me a rhetorical flourish), EPA believes that fossil fuel plants result in significant morbidity and mortality, even aside from climate change, and Massachusetts, which wants to lead the nation in moving to an economy based on renewable energy, is going to get itself tied into knots evaluating claims that wind turbines annoy people? I sure hope not.

I do love that the report acknowledges that “annoyance ‘per se’ is not a biological disease.” Oh, really? That’s good; otherwise, I’d be feeling diseased right about now. We’ve known for years that Bill Koch is annoyed that Cape Wind will be in the view shed from his lovely house on Nantucket Sound (and, to be non-partisan, that the Kennedys are also annoyed).

On the scales of cost and benefit, I just pray that MassDEP, the MEPA office, and the Massachusetts legislature (which is still reviewing wind siting legislation), give concerns about annoyance exactly as much consideration as they deserve.

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