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Photo by Jennifer Ashawasegai

Wind farm health and environment

By Jennifer Ashawasegai, Today correspondent
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Headaches, dizziness, sleep disturbances, nausea, irritability, rapid heart rate, problems with concentration and memory, ringing in the ears; it may be "Wind Turbine Syndrome."

It's a new term coined by Dr. Nina Pierpont, a pediatrician in upstate New York. The doctor has been documenting and interviewing people who live near wind turbines, and is releasing a book based on the findings. As wind farms crop up in populated areas, health concerns are growing, and the Internet abounds with the latest news from anti-wind turbine citizen groups.

For instance, residents in southern Ontario, near Melancthon, in Dufferin County have been complaining that the turbines near their homes are making them sick. CTV has been reporting residents in that area have health concerns from nose bleeds to body aches and trouble sleeping.

Although Wasauksing First Nation Elder Aileen Rice is confident with current environmental regulations, though she would like more information on the health impacts of wind turbines in close proximity to homes. She feels there is still not enough information and long term studies to base her decision. "I need to have more information on the health impacts."

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The Sudbury Star recently reported that there hasn't been any health complaints from residents near the Prince Wind Farm near Sault Ste. Marie. The wind farm is one of the largest in the province and is now three years old. The Algoma District Health Unit told The Sudbury Star that no concerns have been called in by residents close to the turbines.

Wind farms, offering environmentally friendly energy are popping up all over the map, and First Nations are jumping on board with developers. But First Nations are aware of the health concerns and controversies surrounding the turbines. As a matter of fact, they are quite cautious in plans on exactly where the turbines are going to be installed.

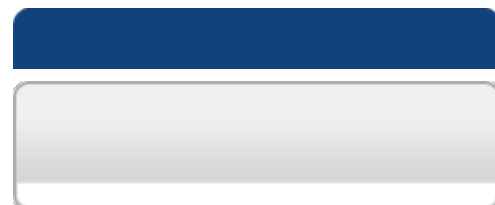
Based on her findings, Peirpont is calling for at least a two kilometer setback of turbines from homes. The current allowance, or buffer zone, in Ontario's new [Green Energy Act](#), is 550 meters from residences.

[Wasauksing First Nation](#) is in a partnership with [Skypower Corporation](#) to develop a wind farm on the First Nation along the shore of Georgian Bay, near Parry Sound, Ontario. Chief Shane Tabobondung said everyone is concerned about the health impacts, and there is "no real science" behind low frequency emissions. But Tabobondung thinks the reported health concerns are due to the older, noisier turbines. In his community, "turbines will be at least 10 kilometers away from residential areas."

First Nation communities have the luxury of space, and, unlike heavily populated locations, are able to spread out turbines on land that is not densely populated. Wasauksing First Nation is 19,000 acres, with a population of about 350.

[Henvey Inlet First Nation](#), just north of Wasauksing First Nation, also along the shores of Georgian Bay, has nearly 28,000 acres of land. The community is split into two parcels, and the proposed wind farm would have turbines on land along the shore of Georgian Bay. The piece of land there is 21,000 acres. The land is also sparsely populated with about 10 residents and a handful of seasonal cottages. The proposed turbines in HIFN would also exceed current Green Energy standards.

HIFN Special Projects Consultant Ken Noble said the community is concerned about health impacts the



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turbines could cause and is aware of residential complaints. “The health impacts that have occurred are factual and should be respected.” Noble said some of the extreme health concerns could be avoided by increasing buffer zones.

HIFN has yet to conduct an environmental assessment for the project. However, under the new legislation, detrimental impact on bats and migratory birds are not allowed.

“Impacts on other types of wildlife are less certain, however, many farmers continue to utilize fields surrounding turbines and allow their sheep and cows to graze,” Noble said. Wild animals co-exist with significant intrusions by rail and highways, but the impact of large scale wind farms on wildlife is currently unknown.

The Mistahay Utin (Lots of Wind in the Cree language) project in Saskatchewan will also have larger setbacks for potential turbines on the First Nation or in the territory around Cowessess and Gordon First Nations. All Nations Energy Developments Corporation is considering a 100 MW project with TransAtlanta Corp. ANEDC is owned by Cowessess and Gordon First Nations. Grady Lerat, a Cowessess board member said turbines will most likely be situated at least five kilometers from any residence. Lerat said there’s still a lot of work that needs to be done before sites for turbines can be considered.

“Elders still need to identify all the medicines in the area, First Nations technical knowledge needs to be considered, and we still need to study the migration patterns of birds and animals in the area.”

Both First Nations are part of Treaty Four in the Qu’Appelle Valley and are relatively large. According to the 2006 Statistics Canada Census, about 612 of the community’s citizens reside on the First Nation, which is comprised of nearly 88,000 acres of land. George Gordon First Nation has a higher population on a smaller land base, at about 900 members living on the First Nation, which is more than 35,000 acres.

The Prince Wind Farm is owned by [Brookfield Renewable Power Inc.](#), which has been partnering with many First Nations. Director of Wind Development Burk Gursoy said they will be signing a memorandum of understanding with an Ontario First Nation and are working with another First Nation in the province. Gursoy has read a lot of reports on health impacts, and said it’s a relatively new phenomena, and defends the health and safety of the turbines.

“There are 68,000 wind turbines worldwide in operation. Many of those have been in operation for 20 to 25 years, and none of these claims have been substantiated.” Gursoy said the noise, infra-sound and shadow flicker are an annoyance factor. He said not everyone has the same likes and dislikes regarding the aesthetics of the turbines.

