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Are wind farms bad for your health?

LIKE creatures from The War Of The Worlds they frantically wave their arms across the scenery as if semaphoring to some distant ally. Not only is it impossible to avoid them, placed as they are but their ceaseless movement draws the eye from wherever else it may rest. Nobody with an ounce of respect for the countryside could have permitted their erection.

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These were the words as long ago as 1995 of Sir Simon Jenkins, now chairman of the National Trust. He was describing a wind farm perched on the Cemmaes mountain ridge in mid-Wales. Once an “unsullied panorama of British landscape” it had been “defaced” by the construction of 24 giant wind turbines.

Since then great swathes of the UK’s greenest pastures have been ravaged, the landscapes not only assaulted by the alien structures but also by the access roads dug to build and service them.

Rare Red Kites from the Brechfa Forest play Russian roulette flying among the turbines of the Altwallis wind farm north of Carmarthen in Wales. Retired pilot Terry Neil and wife Kathryn live on Lan Farm two thirds of a mile away.

“We moved here in 1997 and found this place at the end of a little valley set in beautiful scenery,” Terry says.

We know that turbines are blots on the landscape – but as we reveal here there are growing concerns that they make people who live near them ill

“It was a place of great natural beauty and very serene. We moved here for that reason and then they put 10 of these things on the hill above us. We get shadow and flicker from the turbines and Kathryn has migraines she never did before.

There are 10 original turbines and we’re desperately fighting another development of 28. The new ones will be even larger at 426ft high.”

As their case shows it is not just the devastating blight on our countryside caused by the 3,209 wind turbines installed across the UK to date. Our health is also at stake.

Reports from across the world suggest turbines can trigger a range of problems from migraines and disrupted sleep to heart disease, tinnitus, vertigo and panic attacks.

Leading American doctor Nina Pierpont studied symptoms displayed by those living near such turbines in the US, UK, Italy, Ireland and Canada and identified what she dubbed as Wind Turbine Syndrome (WTS).

Rather than the high-frequency sounds produced by wind farms that can be disruptive but are relatively harmless, WTS is triggered by low-frequency sound waves or infrasound, which can cause visceral vibratory vestibular disturbance – abnormal stimulation of parts of the inner ear.

STAND directly beneath the rotating arms of a turbine and the chances are you won't hear much. But depending on the topography, wind direction and weather conditions, a few hundred feet away it's a very different story.

One person who knows this better than most is Jane Davis, a retired health visitor and midwife who lived on a farm half a mile from the Deeping St Nicholas wind farm in Lincolnshire. The eight turbines were built in 2006 and within three days of their becoming operational the Davis family noticed a constant hum emanating from them.

"We had issues with various loud noises and low-frequency sounds that created a hum in the house all the time, not just when the turbines were turning," says Jane.

Within weeks they developed a long list of grave health problems. Jane's father-in-law John suffered a heart attack and developed tinnitus, hearing loss, vertigo and depression.

Mother-in-law Eileen suffered pneumonia and kidney and bladder problems and husband Julian developed pneumonia, depression and an increased heart rate. All of them suffered from sleep deprivation. None of them had any significant health problems before.

Coincidence? Perhaps, but there have been further scientific studies carried out on the low-frequency sound waves the turbines emit and their possible effects on the body.

American professor Alec Salt, who has conducted extensive research on the effects of amplitude modulation on the inner ear, claims: "The wind industry has taken the position that if you cannot hear the infrasound then it cannot affect you. We disagree strongly. Although subjective hearing is insensitive to infrasound, the ear itself does respond to such sounds. In addition, after long-term exposure it is scientifically plausible that the brain learns that the infrasound represents an external signal and locks in on it. In our view, the possibility that wind turbine noise may have adverse effects on humans cannot be dismissed."

Wind power companies deny the existence of WTS, saying studies carried out so far are "not robust".

Jane Davis and her family sued Fenland Windfarms Ltd for noise nuisance in a five-year legal battle she describes as "worse than fighting cancer".

"We finally got to court last summer. We had three weeks in the High Court and I was eight days on oath and five in the dock," says Jane. "The case was adjourned so more noise monitoring could be carried out. But the day before the noise evidence was due to be heard, on November 29, 2012, the case was settled out of court."

This is all Jane can say. In January of this year the family's house was purchased by Fenland Windfarms Ltd for £125,000, 20 per cent below the valuation given by estate agents. It remains uninhabited.

Over the past decade especially, since the Renewables Obligation was brought in by Tony Blair's government in April 2002 to ensure an increasing amount of energy is sourced from renewable resources, the wind farm industry has been booming. Not least because farms receive significant subsidies in the form of Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs) for every megawatt hour of energy they produce.

IF WE assume a ROC is worth on average £45 and a typical large 260ft high onshore turbine in the UK with a capacity of 1 megawatt (MW) produces 2,628 megawatt hours (MWh) per year a single turbine will yield £118,260 per year in ROCs.

The largest wind farm in the UK, Whitelee near Glasgow, has 140 turbines so we can estimate it receives £16,556,400 per year in ROCs alone.

It's no surprise investors have taken note. In the UK today there are 336 operational onshore wind farms, 69 under construction, 263 that have consent to build and 345 in planning. There have been so many applications to build wind farms we're well on course to far exceed government targets of 30 per cent renewable electricity by 2020 – so much so that ROCs will be cut by 10 per cent from April 2013.

The problem with wind energy is that if it is not utilised as soon it is produced it is wasted. When there is no wind we have to rely on other sources including nuclear power. And when the wind is blowing at full force much of it is wasted because all the energy cannot be converted into electricity at once.

Wind power may have a part to play in our quest for renewable energy but our obsession is excessive.

Regulations should be imposed on the industry and an investigation of infrasound's impact on our health needs to be commissioned with an agreed distance set between potential wind turbines and residential areas. The latest research suggests nothing less is required.

Why I don't think wind costs the earth

By Maf Smith Deputy Chief Executive, RenewableUK

Britain is the windiest country in Europe so let's use it to the full. We have enough wind energy installed to supply nearly five million households all year round. We already get five per cent of our electricity from wind turbines – we're on course to get 25 per cent of it by 2020. Turbines don't need much wind to start turning that's why they generate electricity for at least 80 per cent of the time.

We want to keep electricity bills as low as possible. So we have to stop importing massive amounts of expensive fossil fuels from abroad as we have no control over how much they cost. We know exactly how much wind costs: just 2p per household per day – that's according to independent regulator Ofgem.

Nearly 12,000 people work in the UK's wind energy industry.

That number is set to increase to nearly 90,000 by 2021.

Independent opinion polls by Ipsos MORI show two-thirds of us want more wind power, and 57 per cent have no problem with the visual impact of wind turbines on the landscape.

There are many myths peddled about wind energy, often by those with a vested interest in spreading untruths.

The fact is that modern wind turbines aren't noisy. Try standing right under one and hear how quiet they are. No doctors who are experts in the field believe that wind turbines affect people's health. There's no peer-reviewed evidence to support any such claims. And there's no direct evidence that they affect house prices, in fact the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors says they don't.

This reliable source of power is providing us with a secure supply of energy and jobs while cutting carbon emissions – so wind doesn't cost the Earth.

- RenewableUK is the trade association representing the wind and marine energy industries

Read the original article: <http://www.express.co.uk/expressyourself/338986/Are-wind-farms-bad-for-your-health>