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# **Setback Siting Guidelines for Wind Energy Projects**

**Prepared for:**

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March 28, 2024



## ***Setback Siting Guidelines for Wind Energy Projects***

### **Ollson Environmental Health Management**

Canada continues to see exponential growth in the installation of wind turbines across the country. Over the years onshore wind turbines have grown from 1.5 megawatt (MW) machines (~400 feet tall) to the current models typically ranging from >2.5 MW to 7 MW (500 feet to over 600 feet). With over 15,000 MW of generating capacity, there are over 6,000 wind turbines across Canada and more than 300 in Nova Scotia. It is anticipated that the need for wind energy will continue to expand, especially in light of Nova Scotia's goal of 80% of electrical generation by renewables by 2030.

With the growth of the industry has come the need to develop proper siting guidelines to ensure the protection of wildlife, the environment, and public health. There are no overarching federal guidelines that govern wind turbine installation and their interaction with local residents. The Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Climate Change (NSDECC) has established a series of guidelines for wind turbine sound and shadow flicker that are reviewed under the provincial Environmental Assessment processes. However, setting appropriate setback back distances to homes, cottages, and dwellings are left to the local municipalities.

West Hants Regional Municipality (West Hants) Council has directed the Planning Staff to review potential amendments to the West Hants Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law (WHLUB) to consider increasing the required setback for large-scale wind turbines from dwellings to 4 km.

### **Setting Science-Based Wind Energy Siting Requirements**

There is no question that setting appropriate wind turbine siting guidelines for sound and distance setback to homes is a complicated undertaking. As with any energy production project one needs to balance community concerns with the need for the renewable energy and economic benefits, while still ensuring the protection of public health and welfare of the local population.

Appropriate setback distances to dwellings go hand in hand with sound and shadow flicker standards to ensure protection of public health and welfare. In addition, setbacks need to account for public safety issues with respect to potential ice throw, blade failure, and tower collapse. Public safety setback distances are often set both to non-participating property lines and dwellings themselves.

Over the past twenty years there has been extensive research evaluating public health, safety and welfare concerns of those living in proximity to wind turbines. This independent research by university professors, consultants and government agencies has taken place in many different countries on a variety of turbine models, many of which have been in communities for years. It is on the basis of this research that municipalities should set appropriate setbacks to dwelling. Caution

OEHM recommends that West Hants Regional Municipality adopt into their By-law their previously established practice of using a 1 km setback to dwellings and 550 m to woods camps for existing projects. Based on the available scientific literature, this is more than sufficient to ensure the protection of the public health and safety of their residents. In fact, a lesser setback between 550 m to 1 km would be equally protective of public health and safety. There is no scientific basis to increase these setbacks. It would afford no additional protection of public health and safety and would unduly restrict areas for development.

should be exercised to not establish excessive setbacks that afford no additional benefit or protection of public health and safety.

### **Common Sound, Shadow Flicker and Setback Standards for Wind Energy Projects**

The audible sound limit established by the NSDECC of 40 dBA Leq at dwellings (ambient sound + wind turbine sound), protects against direct and indirect potential health impacts, while ensuring people's quality of life and enjoyment of their property. This sound standard is amongst the most stringent anywhere in the world. The setback distance required to meet this stringent sound standard at most dwellings would be approximately 500 m. This is confirmed by individual sound modeling reports produced for each new proposed project. It is the cumulative sound from existing and proposed turbines. The NSDECC has also set a shadow flicker guideline of no more than 30 minutes a year and 30 minutes during any given event. With the height of modern turbines this equates to a minimum setback also of ~500 m.

There is no overarching Nova Scotia setback siting criteria, guidelines or regulations for wind energy projects. Instead, local counties/municipalities establish what they believe to be reasonable siting criteria for wind turbines in relation to dwellings. Setbacks in Nova Scotia typically are fixed distances that range from 550 m to 2 km, the most common of which is 1,000 m (1 km) to occupied dwellings (homes and seasonal cottages; but not cabins/camps) or a multiplier of turbine height to the home.

To put this in perspective, in Ontario the minimum setback distance from a wind turbine to a home is set by the province at 550 m, while in Alberta minimum distances to dwellings is also setback by the counties and typically range from 800 m to 1 km. There are >70,000 turbines across the United States and the most common setback distances are typically 500 m or in some cases a multiplier of wind turbine height of ~3x turbine height (from a 200 m tall turbine this would be 600 m).

The WHLUB does not currently specify a setback distance from wind turbines to dwellings. However, as detailed in the Planning Staff report (December 14, 2023) "*all approved development agreements for wind farms within WHRM require a minimum setback of 1,000 m (3,280.84 ft) from the base of the tower to any dwelling, hotel, motel, or apartment hotel existing as of the date of the agreement, and a minimum setback of 550 m (1,804.6 ft.) from the base of the tower to any woods camps existing as of the date of the agreement.*" This WHRM precedent is consistent with other municipalities across Nova Scotia and in many cases greater than other jurisdictions with operating wind turbines in North America.

### **Potential Health Effects and Wind Energy Projects**

Wind turbine setbacks from homes should, at least in part, be based on the science of potential health implications for those living in proximity. The most significant public health research on how living near a wind energy project could impact health was published after 2015. The weight of public health scientific evidence finds:

- There is no association between wind turbine sound levels of up to 46 dBA at the exterior of non-participating homes and impact on sleep.
- There is no association between distance from wind turbine to homes and does not impact sleep or other potential health impacts.
- The level of low frequency noise or infrasound from wind turbines at non-participating homes does not cause sleep disturbance or other health effects. The levels are typically

within background levels at homes and are well below levels that could induce health impacts.

- The results from the Health Canada study did not show any statistically significant increase in the self-reported prevalence of chronic pain, asthma, arthritis, high blood pressure, bronchitis, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, heart disease, migraines/headaches, dizziness, or tinnitus in relation to WTN exposure up to 46 dB. In other words, individuals with these conditions were equally distributed among people living at all sound levels and distances from <500 m to 11 km in the study area.
- There will always be a percentage of people that self-report annoyance with having to live near wind projects, regardless of whatever sound or setback distances are permitted. This is a well-understood scientifically documented phenomenon. Levels of self-reported annoyance are largely driven by one's feelings towards how the turbines change the visual nature of the landscape and their perception of the perceived fairness in the permitting process for a project. The level of annoyance one feels towards the wind projects does not impact one's health. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to base wind turbine sound and setback standards on people's annoyance levels.
- Public safety setbacks of 110% (or 1.1 times) tip height of a wind turbine to property lines and roads ensure protection against ice throw, blade failure, and tower collapse.

### **Socio-Economic Determinants of Health and Wind Energy Projects**

Wind energy projects bring clear socio-economic health benefits to host communities. These are in the form of taxes, landowner payments, jobs, potential impact on healthcare costs and an offset for the need for fossil fuel derived energy. These all have indirect health benefits at the individual and community level. At the same time wind energy projects allow for continued use and enjoyment of rural and forested areas.

### **Consideration of Cumulative Effect of Multiple Turbines in the Municipality**

Another issue in determining appropriate setbacks is the cumulative effect and visual impact of projects on community members. Often the question becomes how many turbines in a community are enough. Currently, WHRM hosts 13 wind turbines, with another 24 wind turbines under construction by 2025, and potentially up to an additional 27 turbines in the county.

WRHM Council is wrestling with the question of the cumulative effect of wind turbines and how many are enough in one community. There are two distinct issues with respect to this topic. The first is the cumulative effect of the number of wind turbines on public health from sound and shadow flicker. The second is the visual aspect of the turbines on the horizon.

First, health impacts are assessed by the adherence to the sound and shadow flicker standards, regardless of the number of turbines in an area. Each of the sound and shadow flicker standards require an assessment of the cumulative effect of the individual project, as well as any adjacent project within 3 km. That is because the largest zone of influence of sound from one turbine to the next is within 2 km and the same is true for shadow flicker. That means that cumulative effects from all proposed and existing wind turbines are always accounted for.

In terms of the visual aspect of turbines on the horizon, beauty is truly in the eye of the beholder. There are numerous studies that describe that approximately 10% of the population living in proximity to a wind turbine will be annoyed by their presence. However, given that wind turbines

do not impact property values, impact health or result in other impacts on quality of life OEHM does not believe that counties should use health or visual cue as the basis to increase setback distances to turbines. This would effectively be a roundabout way of zoning out wind turbines based on visual appearance. There are counties in Canada and the United States that host hundreds of wind turbines without impact on their communities.

### **OEHM Recommended Sound and Setback Siting Guidelines for Consideration by WHRM**

Based on totality of these findings OEHM believes that the following siting guidelines are protective of public health, while providing a reasonable balance between community concerns and achievable project siting constraints:

- The audible sound limit of 40 dBA Leq established by the NSDECC at dwellings is protective against direct and indirect potential health impacts, while ensuring quality of life and enjoyment of property. This typically requires an approximate setback distance to homes of at least 500 m.
- NSDECC Shadow flicker guideline of no more than 30 hours a year and 30 minutes a day ensures protection of health and typically requires a setback distance of at least 500 m.
- Infrasound and low frequency noise, although emitted from wind turbines, have been demonstrated to be at level that is too low to be of health concern. Therefore, no additional setback standard is required.
- WHRM could consider instituting a public safety setbacks of 110% (or 1.1 times) tip height of a wind turbine to non-participating property lines and roads ensure protection against ice throw, blade failure, and tower collapse. Further distances are not recommended and not required to protect public safety.

OEHM recommends that West Hants Regional Municipality adopt into their By-law their previously established practice of using a 1 km setback to dwellings and 550 m to woods camps for existing projects. Based on the available scientific literature, this is more than sufficient to ensure the protection of the public health and safety of their residents. In fact, a lesser setback between 550 m to 1 km would be equally protective of public health and safety. There is no scientific basis to increase these setbacks. It would afford no additional protection of public health and safety and would unduly restrict areas for development.

These recommended siting guidelines are consistent with requirements of other Nova Scotia municipalities, many counties in Alberta, and far more stringent than the minimum setback distance of 550 m, which is common in Ontario and most jurisdictions in the United States.

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## **1 Introduction**

Canada continues to see exponential growth in the installation of wind turbines across the country. Over the years onshore wind turbines have grown from 1.5 megawatt (MW) machines (~400 feet tall) to the current models typically ranging from >2 MW to 7 MW (500 feet to over 600 feet). With over 15,000 MW of generating capacity, there are over 6,000 wind turbines across Canada and more than 300 in Nova Scotia. It is anticipated that the need for wind energy will continue to expand, especially in light of Nova Scotia's goal of 80% of electrical generation by renewables by 2030.

With the growth of the industry has come the need to develop proper siting guidelines to ensure the protection of wildlife, the environment, and public health. There are no overarching federal guidelines that govern wind turbine installation and their interaction with local residents. The Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Climate Change (NSDECC) has established a series of guidelines for wind turbine sound and shadow flicker that are reviewed under the Provincial Environmental Assessment processes. However, appropriate setback back distances to homes, cottages, and dwellings are left to the local municipalities. This has resulted in a diverse range of siting criteria being implemented within the province and across the country.

In recent years, communities have raised concerns about having wind turbines placed in close proximity to their homes. These issues include concerns around distance of the towers to their homes and property lines, the change to the landscape that comes with construction of a wind project, the sound they will experience at their homes, shadow flicker and safety issues involving ice throw and structural failure of the turbines. It is these issues that need to be addressed when determining appropriate siting criteria for protection of public health, while still ensuring that regulations are not so overly restrictive that projects cannot be built.

Community concerns have led to an explosion of misinformation on the Internet with respect to how living in proximity to wind turbines may impact health. This is not unique to wind turbines and is similar to other modernization efforts and changes to the environment that are typically accompanied by unsupported health claims (e.g., EMF from transmission lines, cellular towers, and cellular phones).

West Hants Regional Municipality (West Hants) Council has directed the Planning Staff to review potential amendments to the West Hants Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law (WHLUB) to consider increasing the required setback for large-scale wind turbines from dwellings to 4 km.

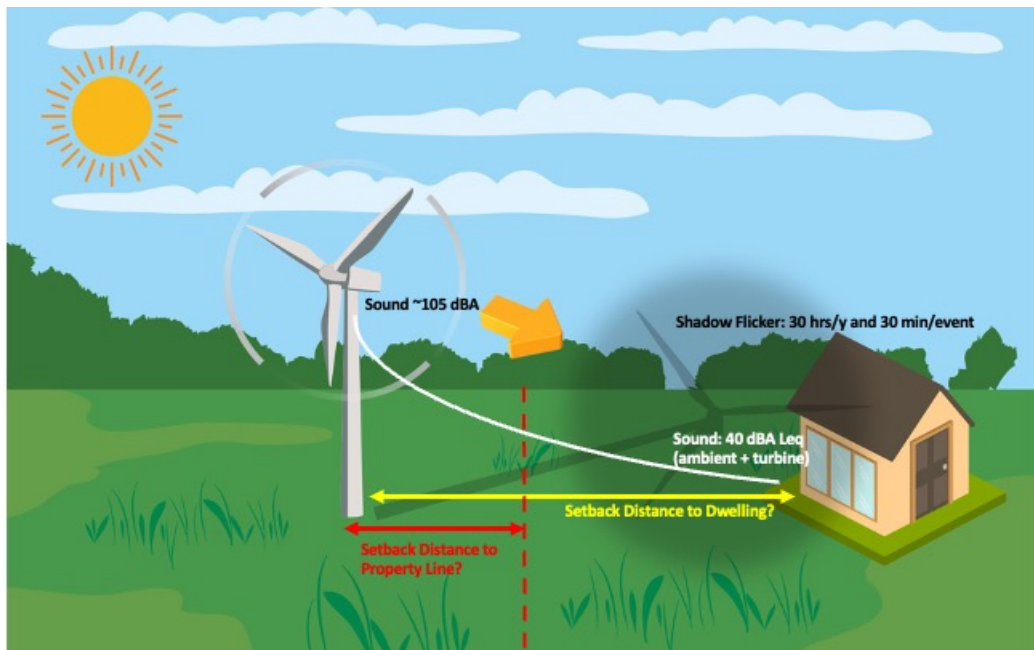
Over the past twenty years there has been extensive research evaluating public health and welfare concerns of those living in proximity to wind turbines. This independent research by university professors, consultants and government agencies has taken place in many different countries on a variety of turbine models, which have been in communities for years.

The purpose of this report is to provide science-based factual information to support siting guidelines that are protective of public health, understands community concerns and recognizes the economic benefits and the desire for wind energy development. The focus of this review is on non-participating homes and property. Although the science on appropriate sound levels to protect against direct and indirect health impacts is well supported, it is acknowledged that issues surrounding level of community annoyance is far more subjective. This is also addressed within the paper.

## 2 Considerations for Developing Science-Based Setback Regulations

There is no question that setting appropriate wind turbine siting guidelines for sound and distance setback to homes is a complicated undertaking. As with any energy production project one needs to balance community concerns with the need for the renewable energy and economic benefits, while still ensuring the protection of public health and welfare of the local population.

Appropriate setback distances to dwellings go hand in hand with sound and shadow flicker standards to ensure protection of public health and welfare (Figure 1). In addition, setbacks need to account for public safety issues with respect to potential ice throw, blade failure, and tower collapse. Public safety setback distances are often set both to non-participating property lines and dwellings themselves.



**Figure 1. Setback considerations**

Over the past twenty years there has been extensive research evaluating public health, safety and welfare concerns of those living in proximity to wind turbines. This independent research by university professors, consultants and government agencies has taken place in many different countries on a variety of turbine models, many of which have been in communities for years. It is on the basis of this research that municipalities should set appropriate setbacks to dwelling. Caution should be exercised to not establish excessive setbacks that afford no additional benefit or protection of public health and safety.

The following sections will first describe how the NSDECC guidelines for sound and shadow flicker are appropriate for protection of public health. This is important to understand so that they can be used to establish minimum setback distances to homes. Next discussion on setback requirements for ensuring protection of public safety from physical issue will be explored. Finally, putting these two issues together OEHM will describe recommended setbacks for West Hants to dwellings.

### 3 Sound and Shadow Flicker Guidelines in Nova Scotia

The first step in setting health-based guidelines for any infrastructure project is to understand its emissions and how they could interact with people in the surrounding area. For wind turbines the emissions of concern are sound and shadow flicker. The studies that justify appropriate standards are later in this document. However, OEHM can attest that the NSDECC standards for sound and shadow flicker are indeed protective of public health.

#### 3.1.1 Nova Scotia Sound Standard (NSDECC, 2021)

The NSDECC's sound guideline requires:

*In establishing separation distances, a proponent must ensure that the wind farm design and turbine siting does not cause sound levels to exceed 40 dBA (A-weighted decibels) at the exterior of receptors.*

The standard requires that all existing dwelling and those with building permits be identified within a 2 km area of a wind turbine. In addition, all existing or permitted wind projects within 3 km of the proposed project must be identified. Then acousticians (noise professionals), knowing the rated sound power level coming from the proposed turbines, use internationally accepted models to predicted sound level that will be experienced at nearby dwellings. These models are conservative and have been demonstrated to accurately predict the wind turbine sound through post-construction monitoring of sound in the field.

These assessments take into account cumulative effects of multiple turbines and multiple projects, as they calculate the cumulative sound coming from each turbine in the area. It also conservatively assumes that the wind is blowing from all directions and carries the sound from each turbine, simultaneously towards the home.

In addition, the NSDECC sound standard requires that the wind turbine sound be added to the existing ambient sound in the area. The cumulative level of sound cannot exceed 40 dBA. The standard approach is to assume a 35 dBA ambient sound level (from Health Canada) add the modeled wind turbine sound level at the homes. Sound is reported on a logarithmic scale, hence to meet the NSDECC cumulative sound standard the highest wind turbine sound can be 38.4 dBA.

**Sound Standard 40 dBA = Ambient Sound 35 dBA + Wind Turbine Sound at home 38.4 dBA**

The NSDECC sound standard is amongst the most stringent around the world and is similar to that required in Alberta. Although the Ontario sound standard is also 40 dBA at homes, it is the wind turbine sound alone and does not take into account ambient background sound levels. In addition, the most common sound standard in the United States is 45 dBA of wind turbine sound alone and can range up to 50 dBA. There are very few US jurisdictions that have a 40 dBA sound standard and there are over 70,000 operating turbines across the country.

There have been hundreds of sound model reports generated for the wind projects across North America. Review of these reports shows that a minimum setback distance from wind turbines, modeled with multiple turbines in a project, to achieve a 40 dBA sound level is typically between 500 m to 750 m (Whitfield Aslund, 2013).

In recent years there have been a number of changes in wind turbine technology. Wind turbine nameplate capacity in megawatts (MW) has been increasing. This has resulted in taller hub heights, longer blades (rotor diameter) and overall height of the wind turbines. In addition, there has been improvement in blade technology, where blades typically now have serrated edges to reduce sound levels emitted from the turbines. The resulting sound power level (SPL) from these newer turbines varies considerably across turbine type and manufacturer.

Regardless of how tall the wind turbines are, or their SPL, it is still incumbent on the wind energy project developers to ensure that the regulated sound level at homes is met. The SPL of the wind turbine model to be used will directly affect how far it must be setback to meet permitted wind turbine sound levels at homes. Therefore, sound levels and setback distances to homes must be evaluated in tandem to ensure compliance with permit requirements. Setback distances from homes should not be set at a distance that would be far in excess than those required to meet the permitted sound level.

Once a project becomes operational it is possible to measure the sound levels at exterior of homes to ensure compliance with permit conditions. This is commonly referred to as post-construction sound monitoring. Field verification testing has demonstrated that proper modeling of sound in the pre-construction permitting process ensures compliance once the wind turbines are operational. If post-construction sound monitoring does reveal compliance issues, the operator is required to bring the offending turbine back within permitted levels. This can be achieved through the noise reduction modes (NRO) in turbines, but is not desirable for the operators as it can affect power output. Therefore, it is imperative that the pre-construction sound modeling is conducted correctly by trained professional acousticians.

**Implications of Sound Standard for WHRM Setback to Dwellings:**

There is no need for WHRM Council to adopt a sound standard, given that the NSDECC existing standard is among the most conservative in the world. Adhering to this cumulative sound standard would require a setback of between 500 m to 750 m from turbines to dwellings. OEHM recommends that the WHRM Council not adopt a significantly greater setback than this and rather rely on the results of the cumulative sound modeling to ensure the protection of public health.

### **3.1.2 Nova Scotia Shadow Flicker Standard (NSDECC, 2021)**

Shadow flicker occurs when interruption of sunlight by the wind turbine blades results in a change in light intensity within a home or building. The flickering phenomenon does not occur unless one is inside a building or structure with windows. As demonstrated in Appendix A, shadow flicker does not cause health impacts. Instead, governments around the world have set what they believe to be reasonable limits on the amount of shadow flicker that non-participating dwellings should experience.

The NSDECC's shadow flicker guideline requires:

*Proponents must demonstrate through modelling that no receptor will receive 30 minutes or more per day, and/or 30 hours or more per year of shadow flicker.*

- *discuss the methods to be used to monitor shadow flicker throughout the life of the development.*
- *discuss the methods to be used to mitigate shadow flicker should modelling be inaccurate or shadow flicker be in excess of 30 minutes per day, and/or 30 hours or more per year.*

The internationally developed shadow flicker models are very accurate in predicting shadow flicker at dwellings. Similar to the sound model, it is a cumulative effects model where the location of each of the turbines in a project and those within 2 km of a neighbouring project are inputted along with the location of the dwellings. Then based on a simple physics model using the location of the sun throughout the year it generates the dates and times that shadow flicker could occur at dwellings from all of the surrounding turbines.

**Implications of Shadow Flicker Standard for WHRM Setback to Dwellings:**

There is no need for WHRM Council to adopt a shadow flicker standard, given that the NSDECC existing standard is very stringent and similar to those used around the world. In fact, the addition of the no more than 30 minutes of shadow flicker a day at a dwelling is more conservative than most North American jurisdictions, that typically on have the requirement of no more than 30 hours a year. Adhering to this cumulative shadow flicker standard would require a setback of between 500 m to 750 m from turbines to dwellings. OEHM recommends that the WHRM Council not adopt a significantly greater setback than this and rather rely on the results of the cumulative shadow modeling to ensure a reasonable level to avoid nuisance with neighbouring landowners.

As the height of turbines has increased, so has the distance from which shadow flicker can be cast from the turbine to a dwelling. For those turbines greater than 200 m to the total tip height it is possible that you could have exceedances of the NSDECC's guideline up to approximately 750 from turbine. That said, there are curtailment measures that can be put in place to ensure that the turbines can be stopped during any shadow flicker events that exceed the NSDECC standard.

#### **4 Setback Guidelines in Other Jurisdictions**

The NSDECC does not prescribe any setback to dwelling and differ to the local municipality. However, they do state some general considerations on setbacks.

*Locate wind turbines far enough away from domestic dwellings so that the turbines do not unreasonably affect the amenity of such properties through sound, shadow flicker, visual domination, or reflected light.*

*The advisable distance between residences and a proposed wind development to avoid any disturbance of neighbours depends on a variety of factors including local topography, climate, character and level of background noise, and overall size of the development.*

Municipalities throughout Nova Scotia have set a variety of setback distances from wind turbines to dwellings. Table 1 provides examples of setbacks from across a number of North American jurisdictions with operating wind projects. In many jurisdictions setbacks are a fixed distance to homes, whereas in others a multiplier on the total turbine height is used to establish the setback distances.

In many cases the rationale for establishing the setbacks has not been provided in a manner easily accessible by the public. However, Dr. Ollson of OEHM has been involved in the development of many of these standards and can attest that the setbacks are typically based on the distance needing to meet sound and shadow flicker requirements and in some cases with an additional buffer for community acceptance.

**Table 1. Typical North American Jurisdiction Wind Turbine Setbacks from Homes.**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Minimum Setback for Wind Turbines from Residential Dwellings</b>
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	
West Hants Regional Municipality	Precedent of 1000 m. (3,280 ft.) from dwelling for existing projects
Municipality of East Hants	4 times the height of the wind turbine
Municipality of the County of Kings	Only permitted in the “Large Scale Wind Turbine Overlay”; the boundaries of the overlay are a minimum of 3 km from dwellings existing on November 15, 2018.
Colchester County	2 km for wind turbines greater than 100 m. (328 ft.). If a wind turbine exceeds 200 m. (656 ft.) an increased setback of 7.5 m. (26.5 ft.) is required for every 1 m. (3.3 ft.) of additional height if the increased minimum setback is necessary to satisfy the maximum ambient degradation noise standard of the By-law.
Municipality of Yarmouth	1000 m. (3,280 ft.) or 6.5 times the height of the turbine, whichever is greater
Region of Queens Municipality	1.5 times the total height of the turbine from all property lines and watercourses
Municipality of the County of Annapolis	Only permitted within a “Wind Resource Areas”; requires a minimum of 1,000 m (3,280 ft.) .
Halifax Regional Municipality	550 m. (1,805 ft.)
Municipality of Cumberland	1000 m. (3,280 ft.) or 3.5 times the height of the turbine, whichever is greater
Municipality of the District of Digby	1000 m. (3,280 ft.)
Municipality of Pictou County	1000 m. (3,280 ft.)
Municipality of the County of Antigonish	1000 m. (3,280 ft.)
<b>Top Canadian Jurisdictions with Operating Wind Projects</b>	
Ontario	550 m from a residence
Quebec	Set by the municipalit� regionale de comt� (MRC) and typically governed by sound standard setback, most common 750 m
Alberta	Set by the counties. Typical setbacks to dwelling range from 800 m to 1000 m.
<b>United States Examples</b>	
North Dakota (State)	<i>One and one-tenth times the height of the turbine from the property line of a nonparticipating landowner and three times the height of the turbine from an inhabited rural residence of a nonparticipating landowner, unless a variance is granted.</i>
Wisconsin (State)	<i>The lesser of 1,250 feet or 3.1 times the maximum blade tip height.</i>
New York (State)	Non-participating, non-residential Structures 1.5 times, non-participating residences 2 times
Illinois (State)	1.1 times tip height to non-participating property lines, 2.1 times tip height to non-participating receptors.
Michigan (State)	2.1 times from occupied community buildings and residences on nonparticipating properties 1.1 times from non-participating property lines
Nebraska (County)	Varies county by county but most common between 300 m to 500 m
Kansas (County)	Varies county by county but most common between 300 m to 500 m

The typical setback distance in Nova Scotia to dwellings (homes and cottages) is 1,000 m. This is similar to what many counties have established in Alberta, which has seen one of the highest growth rates of wind project in Canada over the past decade. Many other Canadian jurisdictions, including Ontario and Quebec with the greatest number of turbines have much lower setbacks of 550 m to 750 m from homes. These provinces tend to have a higher population density living near turbines than either Nova Scotia or Alberta. In addition, many areas of the United States have far lesser setback distances between non-participating homes and wind turbines.

#### Implications of Other Jurisdiction Setback Standards for WHRM Setback to Dwellings:

OEHM recommends that West Hants Regional Municipality adopt into their By-law their previously established practice of using a 1 km setback to dwellings and 550 m to woods camps for existing projects. This is more than sufficient to ensure the protection of the public health and safety of their residents. In fact, a lesser setback between 550 m to 1 km would be equally protective of public health and safety. There is no scientific basis to increase these setbacks. It would afford no additional protection of public health and safety and would unduly restrict areas for development. It would also be consistent, or greater than, other jurisdictions' setback standards in Nova Scotia and across North America.

In all cases these jurisdictions have successfully hosted wind projects for one to two decades. It is true that there are jurisdictions that have greater setbacks. However, in most, if not all instances these setbacks (>1 km) were designed to exclude wind projects from being built in their communities. Setback distances greater than 1 km afford no greater health protection for resident's health.

## 5 Review of Health Research with Living in Proximity to Wind Turbines

An extensive review of the findings of the bulk of peer-reviewed scientific literature on living in proximity to wind turbines is found in Appendix A. Readers are encouraged to consult the appendix for any questions they have on health impacts and siting.

Wind turbine setbacks from homes should, at least in part, be based on the science of potential health implications for those living in proximity. The most significant public health research on how living near a wind energy project could impact health was published after 2015. The weight of public health scientific evidence finds:

- There is no association between wind turbine sound levels of up to 46 dBA at the exterior of non-participating homes and impact on sleep.
- There is no association between distance from wind turbine to homes and does not impact sleep or other potential health impacts.
- The level of low frequency noise or infrasound from wind turbines at non-participating homes does not cause sleep disturbance or other health effects. The levels are typically within background levels at homes and are well below levels that could induce health impacts.
- The results from the Health Canada study did not show any statistically significant increase in the self-reported prevalence of chronic pain, asthma, arthritis, high blood pressure, bronchitis, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, heart disease, migraines/headaches, dizziness, or tinnitus in relation to WTN exposure up to 46 dB. In other words, individuals with these conditions were equally distributed among people living at all sound levels and distances from <500 m to 11 km in the study area.

- There will always be a percentage of people that self-report annoyance with having to live near wind projects, regardless of whatever sound or setback distances are permitted. This is a well-understood scientifically documented phenomenon. Levels of self-reported annoyance are largely driven by one's feelings towards how the turbines change the visual nature of the landscape and their perception of the perceived fairness in the permitting process for a project. The level of annoyance one feels towards the wind projects does not impact one's health. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to base wind turbine sound and setback standards on people's annoyance levels.
- Public safety setbacks of 110% (or 1.1 times) tip height of a wind turbine to property lines and roads ensure protection against ice throw, blade failure, and tower collapse.

**Implications of Health Studies for WHRM Setback to Dwellings:**

The West Hants Regional Municipality previously established practice of using a 1 km setback to dwellings and 550 m to woods camps for existing projects ensures the protection of the public health and safety of their residents. There is no health justification basis to increase these setbacks.

## 6 Consideration Cumulative Effects and Visual Aspect of Wind Turbines

Another issue in determining appropriate setbacks is the visual impact of projects on community members. Often the question becomes how many turbines in a community are enough. Currently, WHRM hosts 13 wind turbines (Martock 3; Ellerhouse 10) with another 24 wind turbines due to be erected under the Benjamins Mills project by 2025, or a total of 47 turbines. OEHM understands that there are two current development permit applications before WHRM for the Bear Lake project (15 wind turbines) and the Ellerhouse 3 project (up to 12 wind turbines), for up to an additional 27 turbines in the county.

OEHM understands that the WHRM Council is wrestling with the question of the cumulative effect of wind turbines and how many are enough in one community. There are two distinct issues with respect to this topic. The first is the cumulative effect of the number of wind turbines on public health from sound and shadow flicker. The second is the visual aspect of the turbines on the horizon.

OEHM has been involved in projects across the continent with more than 100 wind turbines in a single project. In addition, Dr. Ollson has worked in counties that have more than 500 turbines across only two to three counties.

First, as described above the health impacts is assessed by the adherence to the sound and shadow flicker standards, regardless of the number of turbines in an area. Each of the sound and shadow flicker standards require an assessment of the cumulative effect of the individual project, as well as any adjacent project within 3 km. That is because the largest zone of influence of sound from one turbine to the next is within 2 km and the same is true for shadow flicker. That means that cumulative effects from all proposed and existing wind turbines are always accounted for.

**Implications of Cumulative Effects for WHRM Setback to Dwellings:**

The sound and shadow flicker studies inherently include a cumulative effects assessment. There are numerous counties across North America that have far greater number of turbines than proposed for West Hants that have been operating harmoniously with the communities for over a decade.

In terms of the visual aspect of turbines on the horizon, beauty is truly in the eye of the beholder. There are numerous studies that describe that approximately 10% of the population living in proximity to a wind turbine will be annoyed by their presence. However, given that wind turbines

do not impact property values, impact health or result in other impacts on quality of life OEHM does not believe that counties should use health or visual cue as the basis to increase setback distances to turbines. This would effectively be a roundabout way of zoning out wind turbines based on visual appearance.

## **7 Conclusion on Setting a Proper Siting Guidelines for Wind Energy Projects**

There is no question that setting appropriate wind turbine siting guidelines for sound and distance setback to homes is a complicated undertaking. As with any energy production project one needs to balance community concerns with the need for the renewable energy and economic benefits, while still ensuring the protection of public health and welfare of the local population.

Wind energy projects bring clear socio-economic health benefits to host communities. These are in the form of taxes, landowner payments, jobs, potential impact on healthcare costs and an offset for the need for fossil fuel derived energy. These all have indirect health benefits at the individual and community level. At the same time wind energy projects allow for continued use and enjoyment of rural and wooded areas.

Based on totality of these findings OEHM believes that the following siting guidelines could be implemented in West Hants and are protective of public health, while providing a reasonable balance between community concerns and achievable project siting constraints:

- The audible sound limit of 40 dBA Leq established by the NSDECC at dwellings is protective against direct and indirect potential health impacts, while ensuring quality of life and enjoyment of property. This typically requires an approximate setback distance to homes of at least 500 m.
- NSDECC Shadow flicker guideline of no more than 30 hours a year and 30 minutes a day ensures protection of health and typically requires a setback distance of at least 500 m.
- Infrasonic and low frequency noise, although emitted from wind turbines, have been demonstrated to be at level that is too low to be of health concern. Therefore, no additional setback standard is required.
- WHRM could consider instituting a public safety setback of 110% (or 1.1 times) tip height of a wind turbine to non-participating property lines and roads ensure protection against ice throw, blade failure, and tower collapse. Further distances are not recommended and not required to protect public safety.

OEHM recommends that West Hants Regional Municipality adopt into their By-law their previously established practice of using a 1 km setback to dwellings and 550 m to woods camps for existing projects. This is more than sufficient to ensure the protection of the public health and safety of their residents. In fact, a lesser setback between 550 m to 1 km would be equally protective of public health and safety. There is no scientific basis to increase these setbacks. It would afford no additional protection of public health and safety and would unduly restrict areas for development.

These recommended siting guidelines are consistent with requirements of other Nova Scotia municipalities, many counties in Alberta, and far more stringent than the minimum setback distance of 550 m, which is common in Ontario and most jurisdictions in the United States.

### **OLLSON ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT**



Christopher Ollson, PhD

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**Appendix A**  
**Review of Health Implications for Living Around Wind Turbines as the**  
**Relate to Setbacks to Dwellings**

## 9 Health Research Supporting the Proper Siting of Wind Turbines

Wind-based energy production has been identified as a clean and renewable resource that does not produce any known emissions or harmful wastes. As a result, wind power has become one of the fastest growing sources of new electric power generation, with several countries achieving high levels of wind power capacity.

Over 100 studies have been published worldwide to examine the relationship between wind turbines and possible human health effects. Based on the findings and scientific merit of these studies, lead health and medical authorities have stated that when sited properly (i.e., based on distance and/or noise guidelines and setbacks), wind turbines are not causally related to adverse effects.

Appropriate science-based setbacks and sound limits are required to ensure the protection of public health and safety. One needs to ensure these protections for issues on:

- Sound (audible noise)
- Low frequency noise and infrasound
- Setback Distances – public safety

The focus of this review is on the non-participating residences.

### 9.1 Sound (Noise): Audible, Low Frequency and Infrasound

Perhaps one of greatest areas of research on proper siting of wind turbine to avoid health issues is in relation to wind turbine sound and setback distances to homes. The past decade has seen numerous independent research efforts undertaken in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia.

In 2014, Health Canada released the findings of their Wind Turbine Noise (WTN) and Health Study. This is most comprehensive study of its kind to date and its results will be referenced a number of times in this report. The following provides a high-level overview of the study design. This study was initiated in 2012 and was a partnership between Health Canada and Statistics Canada to understand the potential impacts of wind turbine noise on health and wellbeing of communities in Southern Ontario and Prince Edward Island (PEI). A total of 1238 households participated in the study, with an almost 80% response rate of all households within 6 miles (10 km) of projects investigated, making it the largest and most comprehensive study ever undertaken around the world.

Households were located between 820 ft (250 m) and 6 mi (10 km) from operational wind turbines. The A-weighted (dBA) sound levels (audible sound/noise) were grouped into 5 dBA increments with the loudest level in the study at the exterior of a home being 46 dBA Leq (highest nighttime level). These levels are lower than the typical Western state standards of 50 dBA at the exterior of homes.

In 2014, Health Canada released a Summary of their findings on their website (Health Canada, 2014).

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/noise-bruit/turbine-eoliennes/summary-resume-eng.php>

Health Canada's public brochure contains the following statement:

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*Setback Siting Guidelines for Wind Energy Projects  
West Hants Regional Municipality  
March 28, 2024*

*“The Wind Turbine Noise and Health Study is a landmark study and the most comprehensive of its kind. Both the methodology used and the results are significant contributions to the global knowledge base and examples of innovative, leading edge research.”*

I note that Health Canada has provided the following limitations to their study results (Health Canada, 2014):

*As with other studies of this nature, a number of limitations and considerations apply to the study findings including:*

- *results may not be generalized to areas beyond the sample as the wind turbine locations in this study were not randomly selected from all possible sites operating in Canada;*
- *results do not permit any conclusions about causality; and,*
- *results should be considered in the context of all published peer-reviewed literature on the subject.*

It is with these limitations in mind, that I have provided my interpretation of the significance of the results in relation to setting of appropriate sound and setback standards.

Since 2015, Health Canada has published numerous peer-reviewed scientific publications with their results. This research will be discussed as appropriate throughout this report and is often referred to the “Michaud” work as Dr. David Michaud was typically the first author on these papers.

### **9.1.1 Audible Sound**

With any sound source sleep is the critical health endpoint that needs to be protected at residences. However, there are a number of other concerns that have been raised with living in proximity to wind turbines. The past decade of rapid increase in wind power development in North America has been coupled with some who believe that wind turbines should be set miles back from residences, or else it will result in public health impacts. However, the weight of scientific evidence does not hold this to be true. The following section provides an overview of the most up to date, peer-reviewed published, evidence to understand how the proper operation of a wind turbine project should not interfere with sleep.

#### **9.1.1.1 Sleep**

The critical effect from a health perspective in setting any nighttime sound source standard is to ensure that it is protective of sleep. Quality of sleep and sleep perception can be challenging to establish causation through self-reported surveys alone.

In 2006, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies released the book “*Sleep Disorders and Sleep Deprivation: An Unmet Public Health Problem*” (IOM, 2006). At that time they reported that: “*It is estimated that 50 to 70 million Americans suffer from a chronic disorder of sleep and wakefulness, hindering daily functioning and adversely affecting health.*” In 2006 the population of the United States was 298 million, resulting in an approximately 23% of Americans with sleep disorders. This needs to be considered within any review of the sleep literature with respect to wind turbines in the American context.

The following provides an overview of a number of wind turbine specific sleep studies in relation to nighttime noise levels at exterior of homes.

Michaud et al., 2016. Effects of Wind Turbine Noise on Self-Reported and Objective Measures of Sleep. Sleep, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Health Canada)

The journal Sleep is a highly respected scientific publication in this area of research. This is reflected in its five-year Impact Factor score of 5.8. The paper presents the peer-reviewed published findings of the Health Canada study (2014) of wind turbine noise on sleep. The sample size was the entire 1,238 participants from the overall study for self-reported sleep quality over the 30 days using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) and additional questions assessing the prevalence of diagnosed sleep disorders and the magnitude of sleep disturbance over the previous year. For the first time, objective measures for sleep latency, sleep efficiency, total sleep time, rate of awakening bouts, and wake duration after sleep were recorded using the wrist worn Actiwatch2® for 654 participants, over a total of 3,772 sleep nights. It is the largest and most comprehensive of its kind ever undertaken for wind turbine noise.

The following excerpt from the paper discusses the study objective:

*“The current study was designed to objectively measure sleep in relation to WTN exposure using actigraphy, which has emerged as a widely accepted tool for tracking sleep and wake behavior. The objective measures of sleep, when considered together with self-report, provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the potential effect that WTN may have on sleep.”*

The importance of this study is that for the first time self-reported sleep concerns, Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI – a self-report questionnaire on sleep activity) results and objective measures of sleep using actigraphy were investigated for wind turbine noise.

*“Table 2 presents the summary statistics for PSQI as both a continuous scale and a binary scale (the proportion of respondents with poor sleep; i.e., PSQI above 5) by WTN exposure categories. Analysis of variance was used to compare the average PSQI score across WTN exposure groups (after adjusting for provinces). There was no statistical difference observed in the mean PSQI scores between groups ( $P = 0.7497$ ) as well as no significant difference between provinces ( $P = 0.7871$ ) (data not shown). Similarly, when modeling the proportion of respondents with poor sleep ( $PSQI > 5$ ) in the logistic regression model, no statistical differences between WTN exposure groups ( $P = 0.4740$ ) or provinces ( $P = 0.6997$ ) were observed (see supplemental material).”*

Table 2 is an excerpt from Michaud et al. (2016; their Table 1), provides an overview of the self-reported sleep magnitude and contribution of disturbance. It was reported that there was no statistical difference in self-reported sleep disturbance for participants living with exterior to home sound levels from <25 dBA to 40-46 dBA. They reported:

*“The prevalence of reported sleep disturbance was unrelated to wind turbine noise levels.”*

**Table 2. Self-reported magnitude and contributing sources of sleep disturbance.**

Variable	Wind Turbine Noise, dB(A)					Overall	CMH P value <sup>a</sup>
	< 25	25–30	30–35	35–40	40–46		
n	83	95	304	519	234	1,235	
Self-reported sleep disturbance n (%)							
Not at all	29 (34.9)	44 (46.3)	112 (36.8)	208 (40.1)	85 (36.3)	478 (38.7)	
At least slightly <sup>b</sup>	54 (65.1)	51 (53.7)	192 (63.2)	311 (59.9)	149 (63.7)	757 (61.3)	0.7535
Highly <sup>c</sup>	13 (15.7)	11 (11.6)	41 (13.5)	75 (14.5)	24 (10.3)	164 (13.3)	0.4300
Source of sleep disturbance (among participants at least slightly sleep disturbed) n (%)							
n <sup>d</sup>	53	51	186	298	138	726	
Wind turbine	0 (0.0)	2 (3.9)	4 (2.2)	45 (15.1)	31 (22.5)	82 (11.3)	< 0.0001
Children	9 (17.0)	12 (23.5)	21 (11.3)	36 (12.1)	20 (14.5)	98 (13.5)	0.2965
Pets	7 (13.2)	12 (23.5)	9 (4.8)	45 (15.1)	22 (15.9)	95 (13.1)	0.3582
Neighbors	6 (11.3)	5 (9.8)	9 (4.8)	13 (4.4)	5 (3.6)	38 (5.2)	0.0169
Other	41 (77.4)	35 (68.6)	162 (87.1)	232 (77.9)	87 (63.0)	557 (76.7)	0.0128
Stress/anxiety	6 (11.3)	2 (3.9)	21 (11.3)	33 (11.1)	11 (8.0)	73 (10.1)	0.8938
Physical pain	11 (20.8)	9 (17.6)	50 (26.9)	48 (16.1)	18 (13.0)	136 (18.7)	0.0289
Snoring	5 (9.4)	6 (11.8)	17 (9.1)	20 (6.7)	12 (8.7)	60 (8.3)	0.4126

Participants were asked to report their magnitude of sleep disturbance over the last year while at home by selecting one of the following five categories: not at all, slightly, moderately, very, or extremely. Participants that indicated at least a slight magnitude of sleep disturbance were asked to identify all sources perceived to be contributing to sleep disturbance. <sup>a</sup>The Cochran Mantel-Haenszel chi-square test was used to adjust for provinces. <sup>b</sup>At least slightly sleep disturbed includes participants indicating the slightly, moderately, very or extremely categories. <sup>c</sup>Highly sleep disturbed includes participants who reported the very or extremely categories. The prevalence of reported sleep disturbance was unrelated to wind turbine noise levels. <sup>d</sup>Of the 757 participants who reported at least a slight amount of sleep disturbance, 31 did not know what contributed to their sleep disturbance. Of the remaining 726, at least one source was identified. Columns may not add to sample size totals as some participants did not answer questions and/or identified more than one source as the cause of their sleep disturbance.

From the conclusions of the paper:

*“The potential association between WTN levels and sleep quality was assessed over the previous 30 days using the PSQI, the previous year using percentage highly sleep disturbed, together with an assessment of diagnosed sleep disorders. These self-reported measures were considered in addition to several objective measures including total sleep time, sleep onset latency, awakenings, and sleep efficiency. In all cases, in the final analysis there was no consistent pattern observed between any of the self-reported or actigraphy-measured endpoints and WTN levels up to 46 dB(A) [820 ft]. Given the lack of an association between WTN levels and sleep, it should be considered that the study design may not have been sensitive enough to reveal effects on sleep. However, in the current study it was demonstrated that the factors that influence sleep quality (e.g. age, body mass index, caffeine, health conditions) were related to one or more self-reported and objective measures of sleep. This demonstrated sensitivity, together with the observation that there was consistency between multiple measures of self-reported sleep disturbance and among some of the self-reported and actigraphy measures, lends strength to the robustness of the conclusion that WTN levels up to 46 dB(A) [820 ft] had no statistically significant effect on any measure of sleep quality.*

The findings of Michaud et al., (2016) supports the position that residents living with exterior nighttime sound levels of <46 dBA at the exterior of homes should not experience sleep disturbance from the wind turbine sound.

The Health Canada findings are consistent with credible previously published peer-reviewed literature in the field.

Bakker et al. 2012. Impact of wind turbine sound on annoyance, self-reported sleep disturbance and psychological distress. Science of The Total Environment, Volume 425, 15 May 2012, Pages 42-51

Bakker et al., (2012) completed the most compelling research, prior to the Health Canada Study (2014), into wind sound awakenings. This research reported the number or percentage of awakenings with those living in proximity to wind turbines in a rural setting. As can be seen in Table 3 (Table 7 from the Bakker paper), more people in rural environments are awakened by people/animal sound and traffic/mechanical sounds, than by the proximate wind turbines. In this study, people living in close proximity to wind turbines reported being awoken more by people/animal noise (11.7%) and rural traffic/mechanical noise (12.5%), than by turbine noise (6.0%). Sound levels in this study were as high as 54 dBA from wind turbines at the exterior of neighboring homes.

**Table 3. Sound sources of sleep disturbance in rural and urban area types, only respondents who did not benefit economically from wind turbines (Bakker et al, 201)**

**Table 7**

Sound sources of sleep disturbance in rural and urban area types, only respondents who did not benefit economically from wind turbines.

Sound source of sleep disturbance	Rural		Urban		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not disturbed	196	69.8	288	64.9	484	66.8
Disturbed by people/ animals	33	11.7	64	14.4	97	13.4
Disturbed by traffic/ mechanical sounds	35	12.5	75	16.9	110	15.2
Disturbed by wind turbines	17	6.0	17	3.8	34	4.7
Total	281	100	444	100	725	100

From the Health Canada sleep study (Michaud et al., 2016):

*“Study results concur with those of Bakker et al. (2002), with outdoor WTN levels up to 54 dB(A), wherein it was concluded that there was no association between the levels of WTN and sleep disturbance when noise annoyance was taken into account”.*

Jalali et al. 2016. Before–after field study of effects of wind turbine noise on polysomnographic sleep parameters. Noise Health; 18:194-205.

The first study to be published on before–after operation effect of wind turbine noise on objectively measured sleep was conducted in 16 participants living within 1.25 mi (2 km) to a five-wind turbine project in Ontario, Canada. It should be noted that outdoor sound measurements ranged between 40 – 45 dBA before operation and 38-42 dBA after the turbines became operational. The average indoor sound level in the bedrooms was reported as 31 dBA while the wind turbines were operational. For the first time authors used portable polysomnography (PSG), which is a comprehensive system that objectively monitors people’s sleep in their homes.

Although there are concerns about the small sample size and that exterior sound levels were higher pre-operation of wind turbines, the authors concluded:

*“The result of this study based on advanced sleep recording methodology together with extensive noise measurements in an ecologically valid setting cautiously suggests that there are no major changes in the sleep of participants who host new industrial WTs in their community.”*

These findings are consistent with the previous reported studies.

*Smith et al. 2020. A laboratory study on the effects of wind turbine noise on sleep: results of the polysomnographic WiTNES study. SLEEPJ, 2020, 1–14*

This Swedish study was the first of its kind to be conducted in a sleep laboratory setting. A total of 50 participants were recruited for the study. Twenty-four “Exposed” participants were selected from a group who lived within 1 km of a wind turbine and self-reported annoyance or sleep disturbance at their homes. There were 26 participants in the “Reference” group that did not live close to wind turbines.

Each of the group’s physiologic and self-reported sleep effects was analyzed using polysomnography, electrocardiography, salivary cortisol and questionnaire endpoints. Their sleep was monitored over three consecutive nights (23:00 to 7:00): habituation night, quiet control night, and wind turbine noise night that simulated a 32 dBA Leq wind turbine sound in homes. Although this study does have some merit the results should be viewed with caution. It involved only a single night exposure to wind turbine noise in a laboratory setting, there may have been self selection bias with those living in proximity to wind turbines and the results could at best be used to establish in home future studies.

The researchers reported:

*Physiologic effects of WTN were not found for the majority of sleep measures, which implies that nocturnal WTN may not be of major public health relevance. On the other hand, the self-reported data give indications of poorer sleep quality and restoration, which may contribute to a risk for long-term health effects in ways not captured by PSG.*

However, the researchers also reported:

*The Exposed study group gave a more negative rating of sleep quality, tiredness, and sleeping worse than usual compared to the Reference group in both the Control and WTN-night. They also reported higher noise-induced sleep disturbance overall, in both the Control and WTN-night compared to the Reference group.*

When reviewed in context to the sleep studies that were actually completed inside homes of those living in proximity to wind turbines (Michaud et al., 2016 and Jalali et al., 2016) the Smith et al. (2020) study is consistent in that physiological are unlikely of major public health relevance. The self-reported sleep results in such a small number of participants is not consistent with the field studies involving many more participants.

*Liebich et al. 2020. A systematic review and meta-analysis of wind turbine noise effects on sleep using validated objective and subjective sleep assessments. Journal of Sleep Research*

Recently, researchers in Australia undertook a systematic review and meta-analysis of the published literature of how wind turbine noise may impact both objective and subjective sleep outcomes.

They retained nine studies for review, with five of them containing sufficient data that could be used in the meta-analysis of sleep outcomes. The systematic review includes the three publications already reviewed above in the OEHM report. They found:

*The meta-analysis of five studies found no evidence to support that objectively measured sleep latency, sleep efficiency, time spent asleep and awake during the night are significantly different in the presence versus absence of WTN exposure.*

They could not conduct a meta-analysis on the self-reported sleep outcomes because the measurement outcomes were not consistent enough between studies. They concluded:

*This systematic review and meta-analysis suggests that WTN does not significantly impact key indicators of objective sleep. Cautious interpretation remains warranted given variable measurement methodologies, WTN interventions, limited sample sizes, and cross-sectional study designs, where cause and-effect relationships are uncertain. Well-controlled experimental studies using ecologically valid WTN, objective and psychometrically validated sleep assessments are needed to provide conclusive evidence regarding WTN impacts on sleep.*

The authors also opined that:

*Field studies are clearly the most ecologically valid and most representative of real-world WTN conditions in comparison to in-laboratory studies.*

To date, this is the most comprehensive review of wind turbine sound exposure and sleep. It is acknowledged that the authors did suggest that further in-home studies are needed to provide “conclusive evidence”. This additional research is currently underway in Australia.

*Michaud et al., 2021. Sleep actigraphy time-synchronized with wind turbine output. SLEEPJ, 2021, 1–12. (Health Canada)*

In March of 2021, the Health Canada team published their findings on a re-evaluation of their original collection of sleep data for those living around wind turbines. They further refined the data evaluation of the sleep actigraphy data to 10-minute intervals and time synchronized it to wind turbine supervisory control and data acquisition. Overall, they concluded:

*Maximum calculated nightly average wind turbine SPL reached 44.7 dBA (mean = 32.9, SD = 6.4) outdoors and 31.4 dBA (mean = 12.5, SD = 8.3) indoors. Wind turbine SPL in 10 min intervals, and nightly averages, was not statistically associated with actigraphy outcomes. However, the variability in wind turbine SPL due to changes in wind turbine operation across the sleep period time, as measured by the difference between the 10 min SPL and the nightly average SPL ( $\Delta$ SPL), was statistically related to awakenings ( $p = 0.028$ ) and motility ( $p = 0.015$ ) rates. These diminutive differences translate to less than 1 min of additional awake and motility time for a 5 dBA increase over a 450 min sleep period time. Overall results showed that wind turbine SPL below 45 dBA was not associated with any consequential changes in actigraphy-measured sleep. Observations based on  $\Delta$ SPL provided some indication that a more sensitive assessment of sleep may be one that considers variations in wind turbine SPL throughout the sleep period time.*

The findings of the recent Health Canada research on sleep and wind turbine noise are consistent with their previous findings and the meta-analysis of sleep outcomes provided by Liebich et al. (2020).

Liebich et al. 2022. The effect of wind turbine noise on polysomnographically measured and self-report sleep latency in wind turbine noise naïve participants. SLEEPJ. Vol 45. No. 1. pg 1-11.

The objective of the study was to assess the impact of wind turbine noise (WTN) on polysomnographically measured and diary-determined self-reported sleep latency compared to a controlled background in a laboratory sleep chamber. There were 23 urban participants that were naïve (never heard before) to wind turbine sound. They were exposed to 33 dBA of interior bedroom previously recorded wind turbine sound. This mimics the expected sound level of a home that would have windows open and an exterior wind turbine sound level of 40 dBA or greater. They concluded:

*“WTN effects on objective and subjective sleep latency were assessed via a two-night sleep study in a controlled sleep laboratory setting using polysomnography and sleep diary measures in a sample of health sleeps not typically exposed to WTN. No differences were found in objective or subjective sleep latency when WTN at 33 dB(A) was presented during the sleep onset period compared to control background noise at 23 dB(A). Furthermore, no differences were found in latency to N2 sleep, nor in the proportion of individuals who took >20 or >30 min to fall asleep in the presence versus absence of WTN.”*

Liebich et al. 2022a. An experimental investigation on the impact of wind turbine noise on polysomnography-measured and sleep diary-determined sleep outcomes. SLEEPJ. Vol 45. No. 8. pg. 1-16.

In this study the authors expanded the group of participants to 68 that included residents living close to turbines that previously reported sleep disruption, residents who report traffic sleep disruption and two control groups. The groups participated in a four-night laboratory sleep study in which control background noise was 19 dBA and interior bedroom previously recorded WTN of 25 dBA. This level of sound was to reproduce the expected sound levels inside an Australian home with windows open and a 40 dBA sound level at the exterior of the home.

*Overall, these results do not support that acute WTN exposures approximating median WTN exposure levels around 3 km from a windfarm, measurably impact sleep assessed using conventional sleep scoring metrics, including in individuals with self-reported sleep difficulties attributed to WTN living at a similar distance. However, further studies remain warranted to test for effects of higher WTN exposure levels on traditional sleep macrostructure outcomes, subtle microstructural sleep parameters, and impacts on nextday mood, anxiety, and performance.*

No individual study can answer all of questions about wind turbine noise and sleep. These studies were well executed, used sound scientific methodological approaches, and provided full details of their potential limitations. Overall, both Australian sleep studies and the recent Health Canada study are aligned with the previous international findings on wind turbine noise and sleep. This suggests that the continued use the NSDECC sound level of 40 dBA is appropriate for ensuring the protection of sleep.

### **Conclusion on Wind Turbine Noise and Sleep**

The recent published findings reveal that there is no association between exterior wind turbine sound levels of up to 46 dBA and impact on sleep. The link between reported sound levels, annoyance and sleep disturbance does not appear to hold. In other words, regardless of the reported wind turbine sound levels or annoyance levels, sleep outcomes are not different for people living with up to 46 dBA at their home with those with 30 dBA at their homes.

#### **9.1.2 Low Frequency Noise and Infrasound**

Infrasound is a term used to describe sounds that are produced at frequencies too low to be heard by the human ear at frequencies of 0 to 20 Hz, at common everyday levels. It is typically measured and reported on the G-weighted scale (dBG). Low frequency noise (LFN), at frequencies between 20 to 200 Hz, can be audible. It is typically measured and reported on the C-weighted scale (dBC) to account for higher-level measurements and peak sound pressure levels.

Universally wind turbine sound standards are set using audible dBA levels, as they are Nova Scotia, and approved based on modeling. Over the past couple of years there have been a limited number of researchers that have speculated that wind turbine infrasound and LFN could be the potential cause of potential health impacts or sleep disturbance. The mere presence of measured LFN and infrasound does not indicate a potential threat to health or an inability for people to sleep. The fact that one can measure infrasound and LFN from wind turbines at either the exterior or interior of a home does mean that it is at a level that poses a potential health threat. In addition, just because there may be a distinct acoustical signature that allows sound engineers to distinguish between low levels of infrasound or LFN from turbines does not mean that it results in health impacts.

Although wind turbines are a source of LFN and infrasound during operation, these sound pressure levels are not unique to wind turbines. Common natural sources of LFN and infrasound include ocean waves, thunder, and even the wind itself. Anthropogenic sources include road traffic, refrigerators, air conditioners, machinery, and airplanes.

Given the growing attention being paid to this issue several recent studies have been published.

Berger et al., 2015. *Health-based Audible Noise Guidelines Account for Infrasound and Low Frequency Noise Produced by Wind Turbines* in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health* Vol 3, Art. 31

The purpose of this paper was to investigate whether typical audible noise-based guidelines for wind turbines account for the protection of human health given the levels of infrasound and LFN typically produced by wind turbines. New field measurements of indoor infrasound and outdoor LFN at locations between 1,312 ft (400 m) and 2,952 (900 m) from the nearest turbine, which were previously underrepresented in the scientific literature, were reported and put into context with existing published works. The analysis showed that indoor infrasound levels were below auditory threshold levels while LFN levels at generally accepted setback distances were similar to background LFN levels.

The paper discusses two guidelines for exposure to infrasound (dBG), although neither is specific to wind turbine noise. The Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management's Draft *ECOACCESS Guideline- Assessment of Low Frequency Noise* proposed an interior

infrasound limit of 85 dBG (Roberts, 2004). This value was derived based on a 10 dB protection level from the average 95 dBG hearing threshold (Watanabe, 1990) and previous Danish recommendations for infrasound limits (Jakobsen, 2001). The Japanese Handbook on Low Frequency Noise provides an infrasound reference value of 92 dBG at 10 Hz and 1/3 octave bands up to 80 Hz (Kamigawara, 2006). These values were derived from investigations that monitored complaints of mental and physical discomfort from healthy adults exposed to low frequency sounds in a room (Kamigawara, 2006).

These guidelines for infrasound would not be reached in homes situated near the Crazy Mountain Wind Power Project. Quite simply, the homes are located too far back from the turbines based on audible sound criteria to have the accompanying infrasound levels exceed these guidelines. In fact, these levels of infrasound are not reached even in close proximity to the wind turbines themselves.

Collective, these data in conjunction with previous reports indicate that levels of infrasound and LFN are not sufficient to induce adverse health effects; therefore health-based audible noise guidelines are suitable for the protection of human health.

From the abstract of Berger et al., 2015:

*Over-all, the available data from this and other studies suggest that health-based audible noise wind turbine siting guidelines provide an effective means to evaluate, monitor, and protect potential receptors from audible noise as well as Infrasound and Low Frequency Noise.*

Simply put, nighttime sound level on the A-weighted scale, and the setback to homes, act as a surrogates to ensure that levels of LFN and infrasound will not impact health or sleep.

In 2012, Turnbull *et al.* published a peer-reviewed paper titled *Measurement and Level of Infrasound from Wind Farms and Other Sources* to put this issue into context with other LFN and infrasound sources (Turnbull et al., 2012). The study was conducted in Australia around wind turbines and other common sources of infrasound and included the Clements Gap Wind Farm and the Cape Bridgewater Wind Farm. The Clements Gap Wind Farm is comprised of 27 Suzlon S88 2.1 MW wind turbines and the Cape Bridgewater Wind Farm is comprised of 29 Repower MM82 2.0 MW wind turbines. They determined that infrasound from wind turbines reached ambient (background) levels within 656 ft (200 m) to 1,180 ft (360 m) (Table 4). The levels were found to be lower than those measured around beaches, gas fired plants and major roadways. Indeed, humans are regularly exposed to infrasound from several natural and engineered sources at levels that exceed those produced by wind turbines. These findings are consistent with other scientific papers in the field.

**Table 4. Infrasound Measurements Near Wind Turbines and other Sources (Turnbull, 2012)**

Noise Source	Measured Level (dB(G))
Clements Gap Wind Farm at 85m	72
Clements Gap Wind Farm at 185m	67
Clements Gap Wind Farm at 360m	61
Cape Bridgewater Wind Farm at 100m	66
Cape Bridgewater Wind Farm at 200m	63
Cape Bridgewater Wind Farm ambient	62
Beach at 25m from high water line	75
250m from coastal cliff face	69
8km inland from coast	57
Gas fired power station at 350m	74
Adelaide CBD at least 70m from any major road	76

With respect to low frequency noise (LFN) and infrasound it is important to understand that Health Canada's Wind Turbine Noise study (Health Canada, 2014; Keith et al., 2016; Michaud et al., 2016) also includes consideration of these sound levels and their impact on health.

Keith et al., 2016 (part of the Health Canada Research):

*“The simple relationship between A- and C- weighted levels suggests that there is unlikely to be any statistically significant difference between analysis based on either C- or A-weighted data.”*

Michaud et al., 2016:

*“In the current study, low-frequency noise was estimated by calculating C-weighted sound pressure levels. No additional benefit was observed in assessing low frequency noise because C- and A-weighted levels were so highly correlated. Depending on how dB(C) was calculated and what range of data was assessed, the correlation between dB(C) and dB(A) ranged from  $r = 0.84$  to  $r = 0.97$ .”*

Because LFN (dBC) and A-weighted (dBA) levels were so highly correlated, Health Canada's conclusions on the absence of direct or indirect health effects for audible wind turbine noise <46 dBA are true also for the noise in the LFN (dBC) range around the wind turbines they studied. In other words, one does not have to conduct additional studies on LFN to determine potential noise health related impacts or sleep disturbance from wind turbines. Therefore, exposure to these frequencies are inherently included in the findings that no sleep disturbance was found in people living with up to 46 dBA audible sound (Michaud et al., 2016).

McCunney et al. (2014), published a study entitled “Wind Turbines and Health: A Critical Review of the Scientific Literature” in the Journal of Environmental and Occupational Medicine. This review came to similar findings of those published by others (e.g., Knopper and Ollson, 2011; MassDEP, 2012; Knopper et al., 2014; Merlin et al., 2014). This review conducted a significant review of infrasound and LFN levels from turbines and potential impact on health.

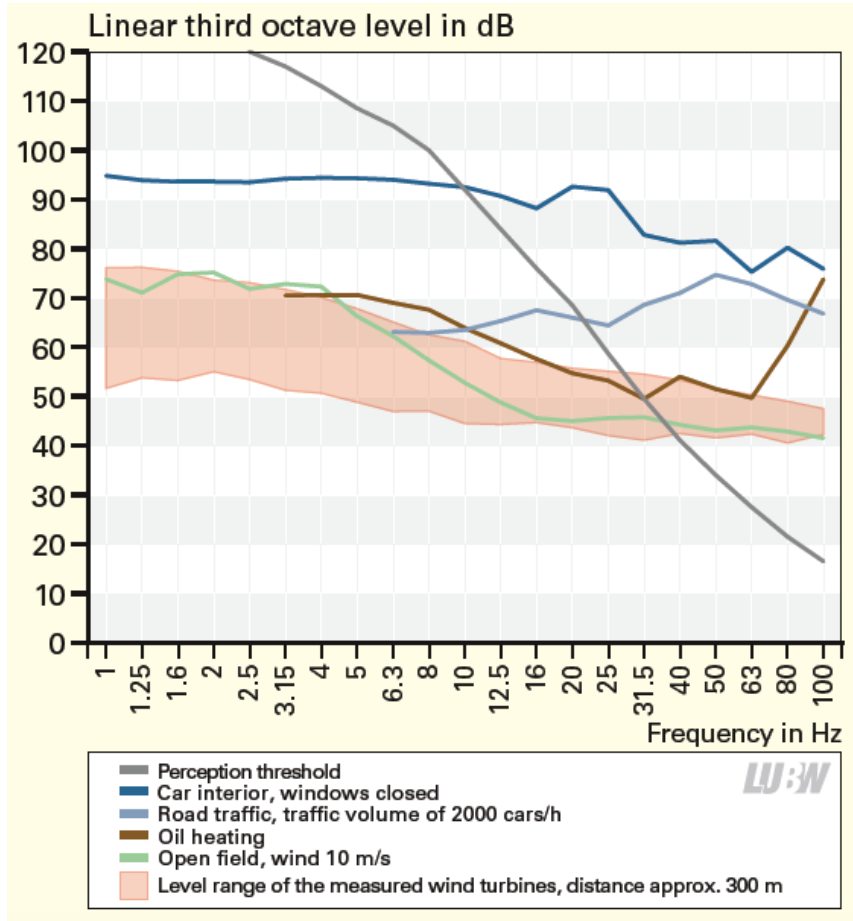
*“Sounds with frequencies lower than 20 Hz (ie, infrasound) may be audible at very high levels. At even higher levels, subjects may experience symptoms from very low-frequency sounds—ear pressure (at levels as low as 127 dB SPL), ear pain (at levels higher than 145 dB), chest and abdominal movement, a choking sensation, coughing, and nausea (at levels higher than 150 dB).<sup>80,81</sup> The National Aeronautics and Space Administration considered that infrasound exposures lower than 140 dB SPL would be safe for astronauts; American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists recommends a threshold limit value of 145 dB SPL for third-octave band levels between 1 and 80 Hz.<sup>81</sup> As noted earlier, infrasound from wind turbines has been measured at residential distances and noted to be many orders of magnitude below these levels.”*

and

*“Components of wind turbine sound, including infrasound and low frequency sound, have not been shown to present unique health risks to people living near wind turbines.”*

In 2016 the Ministry for the Environment, Climate and Energy of the Federal State of Baden-Wuerttemberg in Germany reported on their study “*Low-frequency noise including infrasound from wind turbines and other sources*” (MECE, 2016). The objective of the research was to collect field measurement of infrasound and low-frequency noise around six different turbines by different manufacturers ranging in size from 1.8 to 3.2 MW. Measurements were taken at 492 ft (150 m), 984 ft (300 m) and 2,296 ft (700 m) from wind turbines. Measurements of other common sources of infrasound and low frequency noise were also collected for comparative purposes.

Figure 2 provides detail on the range of infrasound and low frequency noise measured at 984 ft (300 m) from a wind turbine. It can be seen that the levels of infrasound from wind turbines were similar to that of just the wind in an open field, while there was an increase in low frequency sound. The levels were considerably lower than either being in the interior of a car, near the roadside traffic or in a home with oil heating. All infrasound levels (< 20 Hz) were below the perception threshold and international standards.



**Figure 2. Measurements of infrasound and low frequency noise 300 m from wind turbines compared to other sources.**

Overall, they concluded:

*“Infrasound and low-frequency noise are an everyday part of our technical and natural environment. Compared with other technical and natural sources, the level of infrasound caused by wind turbines is low. Already at a distance of 150 m, it is well below the human limits of perception. Accordingly, it is even lower at the usual distances from residential areas. Effects on health caused by infrasound below the perception thresholds have not been scientifically proven. Together with the health authorities, we in Baden-Württemberg have come to the conclusion that adverse effects relating to infrasound from wind turbines cannot be expected on the basis of the evidence at hand.*

*The measurement results of wind turbines also show no acoustic abnormalities for the frequency range of audible sound. Wind turbines can thus be assessed like other installations according to the specifications of the TA Lärm (noise prevention regulations).*

*It can be concluded that, given the respective compliance with legal and professional technical requirements for planning and approval, harmful effects of noise from wind turbines cannot be deduced.”*

Marshall et al. 2023. The Health Effects of 72 Hours of Simulated Wind Turbine Infrasond: A Double- Blind Randomized Crossover Study in Noise-Sensitive, Healthy Adults. Environmental Health Perspectives. 131(3) March 2023

As part of the large Australian National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC) Targeted Call for Research into Wind Farms and Human Health a group of researchers undertook a study to better understand the potential impacts of wind turbine infrasond on human physiology and sleep. Starting at noon, participants were subjected to either wind turbine infrasond, sham infrasond (same speakers not generating infrasond) and traffic noise for a 72-hour period, including 3 nights. The subjects did not leave the test setting that consisted of a bedroom with ensuite mimicking a studio apartment. Each of the 37 noise-sensitive but otherwise health adults (age 18 – 72; 51% female) were exposed to all three noise conditions for the 72-hour period, resulting in a double-blind triple arm study design.

Physiological and psychological measures and systems were tested for their sensitivity to infrasond: wake after sleep onset (WASO; primary outcome) and other measures of sleep physiology, wake electroencephalography, Wind Turbine Syndrome (WTS) symptoms, cardiovascular physiology, and neurobehavioral performance.

The researchers found:

*Our findings did not support the idea that infrasond cause WTS. High level, but inaudible, infrasond did not appear to perturb any physiological or psychological measure tested in these study participants.*

This is yet another study that strengthens the findings that although infrasond is emitted from wind turbines it is not at a level that causes health impacts, wind turbine syndrome symptoms, sleep effects or impairment of neurobehavioral performance.

### **Conclusion on Low Frequency Noise and Infrasond**

The hypothesis that low frequency noise or infrasond from wind turbines is a causative agent in health effects or sleep disturbance is not supported by the scientific and medical literature. Although infrasond and low frequency noise are emitted from wind turbines and their contribution above background sources can be measured close to wind turbines, the levels are typically within background levels at homes and are well below levels that could induce health impacts. Measurements at other wind farms are similar, if not lower, than natural and anthropogenic sources of infrasond that we are exposed to, and are below international guidelines on infrasond.

## **9.2 Other Potential Health Concerns**

Although with any sound source sleep is the critical health endpoint, there are a number of other concerns that have been raised with living in proximity to wind turbines.

### **9.2.1 Peer Reviewed Studies on Self-Reported and Objective Measures of Health**

This section is focused on the literature investigating both self-reported and physical measures of health for those living around wind turbines. Given the extensive nature of the literature it is not possible to summarize it all in this document. Rather, preference has been given to key references and those most recent, or extensive.

There are numerous peer-reviewed studies that have explicitly examined the relationship between levels of wind turbine noise and various self-reported indicators of human health and well-being (e.g., Health Canada 2014 and associated publications; Bakker et al. 2012; Janssen et al. 2011; Pedersen 2011; Pedersen and Persson Waye 2004; 2007). These studies have included a wide range of wind turbine models, manufacturers, heights and noise levels. They were conducted over several years, in some cases over 10 years, after wind turbines became operational. The study of wind turbine health concerns began in Europe in the early 2000s and most recently examined in Canada.

In general, peer reviewed studies do not support a correlation between wind turbine noise exposure and any other response other than some annoyance. For example, various studies based on the results of two surveys performed in Sweden and one in the Netherlands (1755 respondents overall), found that no measured variable (e.g., self-reported evaluations of high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, tinnitus, headache, sleep interruption, diabetes, tiredness, and reports of feeling tense, stressed, or irritable) other than annoyance was directly related to wind turbine noise for all three datasets (Pedersen, 2011) at noise levels below 45 dBA.

The most comprehensive study on health and living in proximity was that undertaken by Health Canada between May and September 2013. Again this study had a 78.9% response rate of those living within 10 km of numerous wind projects in Ontario and PEI. In 2016, Health Canada released a series of peer-reviewed publications on their findings in a special edition of the Journal of Acoustical Society of America in late March of 2016. Given that it was the most comprehensive study undertaken a great deal of weight on this research and its findings is placed on it, given that it is the most recent and comprehensive a cross-sectional epidemiological study undertaken on the topic. Their reported high response rate included 1238 randomly selected participants (606 males, 632 females) between the ages of 18-79 years old. In addition, the study included both self-reported and physical/objective measures of health in participants. The following sections contain conclusions of the three papers examining the potential for health issues to manifest living as close as 820 feet from a turbine and sound levels of up to 46 dBA.

*Michaud et al. 2016a. Exposure to wind turbine noise: Perceptual responses and reported health effects.*

This paper provides the results of Health Canada's investigation into perceptual responses (annoyance and quality of life) and those of self-reported health effects by participants. Only the self-reported health effects results are discussed here. Health Canada developed a final questionnaire (Michaud, 2013) that consistent of socio-demographics, modules on community noise and annoyance, self-reported health effects, lifestyle behaviors, and prevalent chronic illness.

Table 5 is a reproduction of Table V. of the study provides the list of self-reported health effects in the population studied broken down by varying wind turbine noise levels (dBA). Essentially this table reports the prevalence of each self-reported health effect, across varying sound levels, and then uses statistical analysis to provide a CHM *p-value* to determine if the self-reported health effects are significant. Simply put, if the CHM *p-value* is less than  $< 0.05$  then there is a difference amongst the reported effects across sound levels and vice versa if it is greater than  $> 0.05$  then there is no difference in how people are reporting effects across the sound groupings.

Health Canada reported that:

“The results from the current study did not show any statistically significant increase in the self-reported prevalence of chronic pain, asthma, arthritis, high blood pressure, bronchitis, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, heart disease, migraines/headaches, dizziness, or tinnitus in relation to WTN exposure up to 46 dB. In other words, individuals with these conditions were equally distributed among WTN exposure categories.”

This resulted in the overall conclusion of the paper that:

“Beyond annoyance, results do not support an association between exposure to WTN up to 46 dBA and the evaluated health-related endpoints.”

The Health Canada results are consistent with the previous decade of research in the field.

**Table 5. Sample profile of health conditions (Michaud et al., 2016a).**

TABLE V. Sample profile of health conditions.

Variable n (%)	Wind turbine noise (dB)					Overall	CMH <sup>a</sup> p-value
	<25	[25–30]	[30–35]	[35–40]	[40–46]		
n	84 <sup>b</sup>	95 <sup>b</sup>	304 <sup>b</sup>	521 <sup>b</sup>	234 <sup>b</sup>	1238 <sup>b</sup>	
Health worse vs last year <sup>c</sup>	17 (20.2)	12 (12.6)	46 (15.1)	90 (17.3)	51 (21.8)	216 (17.5)	0.1724
Migraines	18 (21.4)	24 (25.3)	56 (18.4)	134 (25.8)	57 (24.4)	289 (23.4)	0.2308
Dizziness	19 (22.6)	16 (16.8)	65 (21.4)	114 (21.9)	59 (25.2)	273 (22.1)	0.2575
Tinnitus	21 (25.0)	18 (18.9)	71 (23.4)	129 (24.8)	54 (23.2)	293 (23.7)	0.7352
Chronic pain	20 (23.8)	23 (24.2)	75 (24.8)	118 (22.6)	57 (24.5)	293 (23.7)	0.8999
Asthma	8 (9.5)	12 (12.6)	22 (7.2)	43 (8.3)	16 (6.8)	101 (8.2)	0.2436
Arthritis	23 (27.4)	38 (40.0)	98 (32.2)	175 (33.7)	68 (29.1)	402 (32.5)	0.6397
High blood pressure (BP)	24 (28.6)	36 (37.9)	81 (26.8)	166 (32.0)	65 (27.8)	372 (30.2)	0.7385
Medication for high BP	26 (31.3)	34 (35.8)	84 (27.6)	163 (31.3)	63 (27.0)	370 (29.9)	0.4250
Family history of high BP	44 (52.4)	49 (53.8)	132 (45.5)	254 (50.6)	121 (53.8)	600 (50.3)	0.6015
Chronic bronchitis/emphysema/COPD	3 (3.6)	10 (10.8)	17 (5.6)	27 (5.2)	14 (6.0)	71 (5.7)	0.7676
Diabetes	7 (8.3)	8 (8.4)	33 (10.9)	46 (8.8)	19 (8.2)	113 (9.1)	0.6890
Heart disease	8 (9.5)	7 (7.4)	31 (10.2)	32 (6.1)	17 (7.3)	95 (7.7)	0.2110
Highly sleep disturbed <sup>d</sup>	13 (15.7)	11 (11.6)	41 (13.5)	75 (14.5)	24 (10.3)	164 (13.3)	0.4300
Diagnosed sleep disorder	13 (15.5)	10 (10.5)	27 (8.9)	44 (8.4)	25 (10.7)	119 (9.6)	0.3102
Sleep medication	16 (19.0)	18 (18.9)	39 (12.8)	46 (8.8)	29 (12.4)	148 (12.0)	0.0083
Restless leg syndrome	7 (8.3)	16 (16.8)	37 (12.2)	81 (15.5)	33 (14.1)	174 (14.1)	
Restless leg syndrome (ON)	4 (6.7)	15 (17.4)	27 (11.0)	78 (17.3)	28 (16.5)	152 (15.0)	0.0629 <sup>e</sup>
Restless leg syndrome (PEI)	3 (12.5)	1 (11.1)	10 (16.9)	3 (4.2)	5 (7.8)	22 (9.7)	0.1628 <sup>e</sup>
Medication anxiety or depression	11 (13.1)	14 (14.7)	35 (11.5)	59 (11.3)	23 (9.8)	142 (11.5)	0.2470
QoL past month <sup>f</sup>							
Poor	9 (10.8)	3 (3.2)	21 (6.9)	29 (5.6)	20 (8.6)	82 (6.6)	0.9814
Good	74 (89.2)	92 (96.8)	283 (93.1)	492 (94.4)	213 (91.4)	1154 (93.4)	
Satisfaction with health <sup>f</sup>							
Dissatisfied	13 (15.5)	13 (13.7)	49 (16.1)	66 (12.7)	36 (15.4)	177 (14.3)	0.7262
Satisfied	71 (84.5)	82 (86.3)	255 (83.9)	455 (87.3)	198 (84.6)	1061 (85.7)	

<sup>a</sup>The Cochran Mantel-Haenszel chi-square test is used to adjust for provinces unless otherwise indicated, p-values <0.05 are considered to be statistically significant.

<sup>b</sup>Columns may not add to total due to missing data.

<sup>c</sup>Worse consists of the two ratings: “Somewhat worse now” and “Much worse now.”

<sup>d</sup>High sleep disturbance consists of the two ratings: “very” and “extremely” sleep disturbed.

<sup>e</sup>Chi-square test of independence.

<sup>f</sup>Quality of Life (QoL) and Satisfaction with Health were assessed with the two stand-alone questions on the WHOQOL-BREF. Reporting “poor” overall QoL reflects a response of “poor” or “very poor,” and “good” reflects a response of “neither poor nor good,” “good,” or “very good.” Reporting “dissatisfied” overall Satisfaction with Health reflects a response of “very dissatisfied” or “dissatisfied,” and “satisfied” reflects a response of “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,” “satisfied,” or “very satisfied.” A detailed presentation of the results related to QoL is presented by Feder et al. (2015).

### 9.3 Recent Systematic Review on Wind Turbines and Health

*Van Kamp, I & van den Berg, F. 2018. Health Effects Related to Wind Turbine Sound, Including Low-Frequency Sound and Infrasound Acoust Aust (2018) 46:31–57*

Both authors work for public health agencies in the Netherlands and are highly regarded experts in wind turbine health research field. They conducted a systematic review of the published literature between 2009 to 2017 on health effects related to wind turbine sound, with particular emphasis on LFN and infrasound.

They concluded that there was no evidence of a specific health effect of the LFN or infrasound components of wind turbine sound. With respect to Dr. Alves-Pereira's work in relation to infrasound from turbines they found:

*Vibroacoustic disease and the wind turbine syndrome are controversial and scientifically not supported. At the present levels of wind turbine sound, the alleged occurrence of vibroacoustic disease (VAD) or the disease (VVVD) causing the wind turbine syndrome (WTS) is unproven and unlikely.*

*Freiberg et al. 2019 Health effects of wind turbines on humans in residential settings: Results of a scoping review. Environmental Research 169 (2019) 446–463*

The authors conducted a comprehensive systematic review of the potential health effects in humans living in proximity to wind turbines. The researchers retrieved 84 articles that varied significantly in methods and health outcomes assessed that met their study inclusion criteria. Overall, they found:

*Multiple cross-sectional studies reported that wind turbine noise is associated with noise annoyance, which is moderated by several variables such as noise sensitivity, attitude towards wind turbines, or economic benefit.*

*Wind turbine noise is not associated with stress effects and biophysiological variables of sleep.*

*Findings from cross-sectional studies of higher methodological quality – that were supported by findings from lower-quality observational studies – illustrated an existing association between wind turbine noise and annoyance and no association between noise from wind turbines and stress effects and biophysiological variables of sleep.*

*In higher quality studies, wind turbine noise was not associated with restricted quality of life, sleep disturbance, and anxiety and/or depression, which contrasts – at least partly – with findings from lower-quality studies."*

*Van Kamp, I & van den Berg, F. 2021. Health Effects Related to Wind Turbine Sound: An Update. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 2021, 18, 9133*

The authors conducted an updated systematic review of the published literature between 2017 to 2020 on health effects related to wind turbine sound. Their conclusions were consistent with their previous literature review (van Kamp & van den Berg, 2018). They reaffirmed:

*There is no indication that the low-frequency component has other effects on residents other than normal sound nor that infrasound well below the hearing threshold can have any effect.*

*Ellenbogen, J. 2022 Wind turbine noise and sleep. Editorial. SLEEP. 2022 1-3*

Dr. Ellenbogen, MD is a highly regarded neurologist and sleep specialist whose focus is on noise-induced sleep disruption. He has been researching the potential for wind turbine noise to impact sleep since he was the lead author on the *Wind Turbine Health Impact Study: Report of Independent Expert Panel* report, prepared for the Massachusetts Department of Health (Ellenbogen et al., 2012). In this editorial he opines that:

*Between Health Canada and this paper by Liebich et al., it appears that the reasonable placement of wind turbines does not pose a risk to human sleep. ...If companies wish to remain in the reasonable window of protection against noise-induced sleep loss, they would do well to limit themselves to using the data demonstrated by Health Canada—allowing noises to not exceed 46 dBA measured outside the residence [8]. The actual, population-based threshold may be higher, but existing data support this number.*

The weight of scientific evidence continues to demonstrate that the siting guidelines of the NSDECC 40 dBA sound level and a 1 km setback, are amongst the most conservative in the world and will ensure the protection of the community's health.

### **Conclusions on Other Potential Health Impacts**

The weight of scientific evidence supports that permitting sound levels at the exterior of non-participating homes of up to 40 dBA Leq and a setback of 1 km to dwellings would not impact sleep or other objective or self-reported measures of health.

## 10 Quality of Life and Wind Turbines

Determining if annoyance or any other perceived health effects for those living around wind projects has also been examined by determining if there has been a diminishment in their overall quality of life (QOL). This relates directly to whether or not annoyance leads to a deterioration of QOL.

There have been a few published papers in this field that have reached inconsistent findings (Shepherd, et al., 2011; Nissenbaum, et al., 2012; Mroczek et al., 2012). They are typically of very small sample size and lead to more questions than answers. The results of these peer-reviewed papers are best summarized in the review papers of Knopper et al. (2014) and McCunney et al. (2014).

However, the most comprehensive work that has been published in this field was through the Health Canada research.

*Feder et al. 2015 An assessment of quality of life using the WHOQOL-BREF among participants living in the vicinity of wind turbines Journal of Environmental Research. (Health Canada)*

They administered the World Health Organization Quality of Life – BREF (WHOQOL-BREF) questionnaire to 1238 participants that lived between 820 feet to 7 miles from wind turbines. This questionnaire evaluates self-reported physical health, psychological, social relationships and environment in relation to QOL. Regardless of sound level at people’s homes wind turbine noise did not influence QOL. They start their Discussion with:

*“The present study findings do not support an association between exposure to WTN up to 46 dBA [820 ft] and any of the WHOQOL-BREF domains (Physical Health, Psychological, Social Relationships and Environment) or the two stand-alone questions pertaining to rated QOL and Satisfaction with Health. Participants who were exposed to higher WTN levels did not rate their QOL or Satisfaction with Health significantly worse than those who were exposed to lower WTN levels, nor did they report having significantly worse outcomes in terms of factors that comprise the 4 domains.”*

In addition, the Feder et al. (2015) paper includes a detailed discussion on how their findings compare with the previous conflicting report. Given the size and comprehensive nature of this study it should be given more weight than previous reports.

Overall, the work by Health Canada suggests that quality of life should not be diminished for residents around wind energy projects with sound levels as high as 46 dBA Leq and living within 1 km of multiple wind turbines.

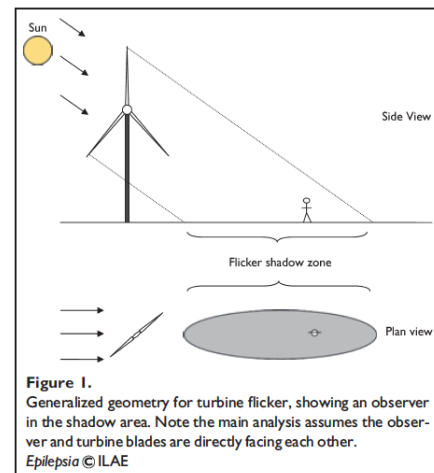
## 11 Shadow Flicker

Shadow flicker occurs when interruption of sunlight by the wind turbine blades results in a change in light intensity within a home or building. The flickering phenomenon does not occur unless one is inside a building or structure with windows. When one experiences shadowing from a turbine when standing outdoors it is simply a rotating shadow cast on the ground. Shadow flicker is unavoidable for wind turbines; however, it typically only occurs for a limited number of hours a year at a home. This is due to the fact that certain factors must be present:

- the sun must be in a precise location in the sky such that sunlight will cast a shadow from the wind turbine;
- the wind turbine must be in operation during this period (i.e., the wind must be of sufficient speed for the wind turbine to be operational);
- shadow will not be cast on overcast or cloudy days; and,
- the shadow will typically not be cast any further than 10x the total height of the turbine to any appreciable extent. For most modern turbines this would mean shadow flicker would not extend much past 2 km.

Conducting shadow flicker modeling has become common practice for proposed wind farm projects across Canada. There are several commercially available software packages, including WindPro that was used to model the shadow flicker for the Updated Project.

All models initially calculate a “Worst Case or Maximum Astronomical shadow” number of hours that a residence may experience shadow flicker (Assessment Case A – Updated Project). These numbers can then be adjusted to provide a “Adjusted, Realistic, Actual or Expected” number of hours of shadow flicker (Assessment Case B – Updated Project). It is important to distinguish between these scenarios, as some jurisdictions have adopted standards based on either astronomical or realistic shadow flicker hour predictions.



**Worst Case / Astronomical (Assessment Case A):** The models consider that the sun is always shining during daytime hours, the wind turbines are always rotating, and the wind direction from each turbine is such that the wind turbine is always perpendicular to the residences so that shadows could be cast at the residences. This is a predicted extreme theoretical number hours that will not occur at any residence.

**Adjusted / Actual / Realistic / Expected (Assessment Case B):** The model is run in the astronomical mode and then the results are adjusted for percentage of monthly cloud cover (solar statistics) and operating hours of the wind project. Under these conditions shadow flicker will not be generated and it more accurately predicts the number of hours of shadow flicker at a residence.

There are other obstructions that can limit both the Worst Case and the Realistic modeled numbers of shadow flicker. These include trees, shrubs, and other ancillary non-occupied structures (e.g.,

barns) that could interrupt the predicted shadow flicker at a home. Neither of the two Assessment Case scenarios takes into account these types of obstructions at residential receptors. Another layer of conservatism is that models are set-up and run in the “greenhouse mode”. This means each residence is oriented to have omni-directional windows and thus it will produce more conservative results since it assumes that there is always a window in direct line of site of each wind turbine and the sun.

The model outputs can show the exact days, the time of day, the duration and turbine of origin of shadow flicker. These values are then summed to provide the annual number of hours of shadow flicker predicted. For the Realistic scenario (Assessment Case B) the percentage of cloud cover and operational downtime is used to adjust these values. Both Assessment Cases A and B provide a conservative estimate of shadow flicker that could be expected at a home.

### **11.1.1 Shadow Flicker Health, Annoyance and Nuisance**

Four peer-reviewed scientific research papers were retrieved that considered the potential for shadow potential to impact health and to increase annoyance or nuisance in people living near wind turbines.

The main health concern raised relating to shadow flicker is the potential risk of seizures in those people with photosensitive epilepsy. Photosensitive epilepsy affects approximately 5% of people with epilepsy where their seizures can be triggered by flashing light. The Epilepsy Society first investigated this issue in the United Kingdom in the late 2000s. They polled their members and determined that no one had experienced an epileptic seizure living or being in proximity to a wind farm from shadow flicker (Epilepsy Society, 2012).

Following on this informal polling two of the United Kingdom’s academic experts in epilepsy published scientific research articles in the area. I previously provided to the Commission that Harding et al. (2008) and Smedley et al. (2010) have published the seminal studies dealing with this concern. Both authors investigated the relationship between photo-induced seizures (i.e., photosensitive epilepsy) and wind turbine shadow flicker. Both studies suggested that flicker from turbines that interrupt or reflect sunlight at frequencies greater than 3 Hz pose a potential risk of inducing photosensitive seizures in 1.7 people per 100,000 of the photosensitive population. For turbines with three blades, this translates to a maximum speed of rotation of 60 revolutions per minute (rpm). The Nordex 155 turbine in the Updated Project has a nominal rotational speed of 11 rpm, well below a speed that could trigger epileptic seizure.

Two of the most comprehensive and widely cited published scientific review articles on this topic are Knopper & Ollson (2011) and McCunney et al. (2014). Both papers concluded that shadow flicker is not associated with health effects for those living in proximity to wind turbines. Knopper & Ollson (2011) concluded:

*“Although shadow flicker from wind turbines is unlikely [to] lead to a risk of photo-induced epilepsy there has been little if any study conducted on how it could heighten the annoyance factor of those living in proximity to turbines. It may however be included in the notion of visual cues. In Ontario it has been common practice to attempt to ensure no more than 30 hours of shadow flicker per annum at any one residence.”*

Since 2014, there have been two studies conducted that examined the potential for shadow flicker to lead to increased annoyance for those living near wind turbines.

*Voicescu et al., 2016. Estimating annoyance to calculated wind turbine shadow flicker is improved when variables associated with wind turbine noise exposure are considered. J. Acoust. Soc. Am. 139 (3).*

In 2016, Health Canada published a paper using the questionnaires of over 1200 people living as close as 800 feet from a turbine they attempted to determine if they could predict the percentage of people that were highly annoyed by varying levels of hours of shadow flicker (SF) a year or number of minutes on a given day. However, although annoyance did tend to increase with increasing minutes a day, they could not find a statistical relationship:

*“For reasons mentioned above, when used alone, modeled  $SF_m$  results represent an inadequate model for estimating the prevalence of  $HA_{WTSF}$  as its predictive strength is only about 10%. This research domain is still in its infancy and there are enough sources of uncertainty in the model and the current annoyance question to expect that refinements in future research would yield improved estimates of SF annoyance.”*

*Haac et al. 2022. In the shadow of wind energy: Predicting community exposure and annoyance to wind turbine shadow flicker in the United States. Energy Research & Social Science 102471. Pg. 1-16.*

This work was completed by the Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory (LBNL) in the United States as part of a large US Department of Energy (DOE) Wind Neighbors National Survey. The purpose of the study was to determine if the duration of shadow flicker could be correlated to shadow flicker (SF) annoyance in the population. Overall, the authors reported:

*This study modeled SF exposure at nearly 35,000 residences across 61 wind projects in the United States, 747 of which were also survey respondents. Using these results, we analyzed the factors that led to perceived SF and self-reported SF annoyance. We found that perceived SF is primarily an objective response to SF exposure, distance to the closest turbine, and whether the respondent moved in after the wind project was built. Conversely, SF annoyance was not significantly correlated with SF exposure. Rather, SF annoyance is primarily a subjective response to wind turbine aesthetics, annoyance to other anthropogenic sounds, level of education, and age of the respondent.*

Similar to the Health Canada findings (Voicescu, 2016), the LBNL study could not correlate the number of theoretical (astronomical) or actual (adjusted case) hours a year or minutes at a time in duration of shadow flicker with annoyance in the population. In other words, limiting the number of hours of shadow flicker on an annual basis at a non-participating home is unlikely to decrease the annoyance the residents feel towards any shadow flicker at all or the turbines themselves.

Therefore, there is nothing in the scientific literature that suggests that shadow flicker should be limited, either for hours per year or total minutes at a time, to protect health or avoid annoyance.

### **11.1.2 Shadow Flicker Standards**

However, I do believe that reasonable limits on shadow flicker are prudent to keep nuisance levels to a minimum at non-participating residences. There are few, if any jurisdictions in Canada,

including Alberta, that regulate a shadow flicker standard. This has led to shadow flicker consultants across Canada to suggest a variety of different guidelines that could be applied to Canadian wind project.

A number of North American jurisdictions have adopted various ordinances and rules limiting shadow flicker on non-participating land. A no more than 30 hours of actual shadow flicker modeled on a residence (Adjusted / Assessment Case B) has almost become the universally adopted standard. Erroneously this level of shadow flicker at homes has often been referred to as the “Industry Standard”. It is not the wind turbine proponents that derived this standard; rather it is one that has been adopted in provincial/state or local statute.

The origins of this standard are traced to Germany in 2002. The German Territorial Committee for Emissions control released the document “Hinweise zur Ermittlung und Beurteilung der optischen Immissionen von Windenergieanlagen, Länderausschuss für Immissionsschutz [Notes on the identification and evaluation of optical emissions from wind turbines], (in German).” The standard was based on limiting the shadow flicker nuisance of local residents. They subsequently codified this formal shadow flicker guideline as part of the *Federal Emission Control Act* (Haugen, 2011). Similar standards to this have been adopted internationally with modifications for shadow flicker. The German standard is: no more than 30 hours of modeled shadow flicker (theoretical / worst case) a year, no more than 30 minutes of shadow flicker at a time, and no more than 8 hours of actual (Adjusted / Assessment Case B) shadow flicker a year on a home.

Each jurisdiction that has adopted a shadow flicker restriction at non-participating residences has had to weigh what would be a reasonable level of shadow flicker that they believe would be acceptable and avoid excessive complaints. It is clear from the Koppen et al. (2017) review of international standards for shadow flicker that they can vary considerably from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. I would caution the NSDECC that the table of shadow flicker jurisdictional standards in Koppen (2017) contains several errors, including for the North American references.

Koppen (2017) states:

*However, there are differences in the exact implementation, like the consideration of only the worst case, only the real case or both the worst and the real case shadow impact. Other common differences are the exact definition of shadow flicker sensitive receptors and the zone of influence which has to be considered. This can lead to considerable differences in energy production losses by a shadow flicker control module.*

Across North America many jurisdictions have successfully adopted shadow flicker restrictions based on the “Adjusted/Actual/Realistic/Expected” scenario (Assessment Case B). The following are some examples of state-wide legislation.

#### North Dakota

The North Dakota Public Service Commission requires effects from the impact upon light-sensitive land uses to be managed and maintained at an acceptable minimum (N.D. Admin. Code §69-06-08-01(5)(c)(3)). The North Dakota Public Service Commission has recognized the 30-hour per year standard and evaluates actual shadow flicker impacts pursuant to this standard. Justification, similar to what is contained in this report, for continued use of this standard has been provided to the ND PSC during several recent wind project applications and hearings.

## Connecticut

Similarly, the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies Section 16-50j-95, part (c) requires:

*Shadow flicker shall not occur more than 30 total annual hours cumulative at any off-site occupied structure location from each of the proposed wind turbine locations and any alternative wind turbine locations at the proposed site and any alternative sites.*

## NSDECC Shadow Flicker Standard

Eliminating shadow flicker at non-participating homes does not afford any additional protection for health. The NSDECC has a shadow flicker standard of no more than 30 hours a year and 30 minute a day. This is a reasonable limit to avoid annoyance or nuisance complaints. To put this in perspective it represents less than 0.5% of the daylight hours a year.

This standard has a long history of success in many North American jurisdictions that have seen over a decade of wind farm operation. Shadow flicker at operating wind projects is rarely a source of complaint. In the very unlikely event of shadow flicker complaints there are a number of mitigation strategies that can be resolved between the companies and landowners.

## 12 Physical Health and Safety Considerations for Determining Appropriate Setback Distances

Public health and safety with respect to wind projects are governed by setback and safety distances set by local, state and federal authorities. In addition, equipment manufacturers have developed similar recommendations based on their experience with projects around the world.

The following describes the suitability of use of a turbine height multiplier for protection from ice throw and blade failure. Overall, these setback distances are not meant to be protective of the fact that these issues can occur, rather the infrequent events under which they happen and the odds that an individual would be harmed.

### Ice Throw

In 2007, Garrad Hassan Canada Inc. was commissioned by the Canadian Wind Energy Association (CanWEA) to undertake a probabilistic risk evaluation of the likelihood of ice fragment throw from wind turbines would strike a member of the public. They used a hypothetical wind turbines, similar to those commonly in operation. They examined meteorological conditions in Ontario, Canada, which are similar to winter environment in Nova Scotia. Three scenarios were examined – Scenario A House, Scenario B Road and Scenario C Individual. Their findings are provided in Table 6.

**Table 6. Ice Throw Strike Probabilities (Garrad Hassan, 2007)**

Scenario A House	Scenario B Road	Scenario C Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1000 ft<sup>2</sup> house</li> <li>• 1000 ft from turbine</li> <li>• 1 ice strike per 62,500 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• north-south road is situated directly west of a turbine at 650 ft</li> <li>• 100 vehicles at 40 mph</li> <li>• 1 vehicle strike per 100,000 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ever-present individual between 65 ft to 1000 ft from turbine</li> <li>• 1 strike in 500 years</li> </ul>

More recent studies on the potential for vehicles or individuals to be struck by ice throw from larger wind turbines support the Garrad Hassan findings. What is seen is that ice throw pieces that would be capable of harming people or vehicles typically fall within a distance of the turbine height.

The results indicate an extremely low probability that an individual or vehicle would ever be struck. They are far less than risks that people face in everyday life (e.g., driving a car, being struck by lightning, or being in an airplane crash).

### Blade Failure

There have been a number of probabilistic studies that have been conducted examining the potential for blade failure to harm people or strike vehicles. In a recent U.S. study by Rogers and Costello (2022) of the School of Aerospace Engineering, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA, titled *Methodology to assess wind turbine blade throw risk to vehicles on nearby roads*, they found:

*For example, using the one fatality per impact assumption, the fatality risk for the 5.5 MW turbine at a 1.1x tip height setback is 1 fatality per 12 million years for 1 vehicle/mile traffic density, and 1 fatality per 1.1 million years for 10 vehicles/mile. Similarly, the results for the 1.5 MW and 3.4 MW turbines at a 1.1x tip height setback are well below 1 fatality per*

*100,000 years for 1 vehicle/mile and 10 vehicles/mile traffic densities. This indicates that, from an engineering safety perspective, the 1.1x tip height setback produces a satisfactory level of risk mitigation for rural roadways.*

*Results for these example turbines show that the typical setback of 1.1x tip height is generally sufficient at reducing risk to extremely low levels (between 1 impact in 1 million years and 1 impact in 10 million years) for roads in rural areas which tend to be lightly traveled.*

In 2013, MMI Engineering Ltd undertook a study titled “*Study and development of a methodology for the estimation of the risk and harm to persons from wind turbines*” for the United Kingdom government. Through their probabilistic assessment they determined that risk of fatality from wind turbine blade fragment throw is low in comparison to other societal risks. It was roughly equivalent to the risk of fatality from taking two aircraft flights a year or being struck by lightning.

#### *Tower Collapse*

Tower collapse is a very rare event, although it is acknowledged that it can occur. When wind turbine tower fail, they tend to collapse within a distance equal or less to their total height. The proposed changes require wind turbines be placed 1.1 times Turbine Height from edge of the Right-of-Way from roads and property lines. This safety distance ensures that in the unlikely event of a tower collapse that the wind turbine will impact only the participating parcel of land and not interfere, or affect, roads or neighboring properties.