

MSU Professor: Wind Turbines Can Cause Illness

Dizziness and nausea are just two symptoms

By [Michael McGrady](#) | January 25, 2019

An audiologist affiliated with Michigan State University has weighed in on the harms of a proposed wind farm development, on behalf of an Ohio veteran who was diagnosed with vertigo and other service-connected disabilities.

Jerry Punch, a professor emeritus in the Department of Communicative Sciences and Disorders, submitted comments opposing the wind farm to the Ohio Public Utilities Commission, which approves new energy projects in the state. He did so on behalf of James Dillingham, who lives roughly 60 miles southeast of Toledo in Scipio Township. In his comments, Punch voiced his concerns over low-frequency sound emitted by industrial wind turbines, commonly known as infrasound. According to Punch's research, the turbines used in wind farm developments can have negative effects on a person's mental and physical health.

"Large wind turbines generate infrasound, which is not normally experienced as sound by most human listeners," wrote Punch and co-author Richard R. James in [a 2016 study](#). "Some people, however," they continued, "experience it in the form of pathological symptoms such as headache, dizziness, nausea, or motion sickness, which appear to be caused by the excitation of resonances inside closed structures and the human body itself." Punch echoed these claims in a letter to Ohio's utility regulators.

"The World Health Organization states that individuals who are most vulnerable to the detrimental effects of environmental noise are the very young, the elderly, and those with chronic health conditions," Punch wrote. "Certainly, Mr. Dillingham falls into the latter category, and his concerns deserve special consideration," alluding to the veteran's several physical and mental diagnoses. Punch also told the utility commission that he wished to evaluate whether the proposed Seneca County wind farm would harm Dillingham.

"The purpose of my letter was to indicate my concern that he receive individualized consideration during Seneca Wind's application process," Punch wrote in an email to Michigan Capitol Confidential. "It was not my intention in my letter to single out veterans as a group, but rather to indicate that persons with vertigo and related pre-existing symptoms such as dizziness, vertigo, nausea, and motion sickness are vulnerable to worsening symptoms following exposure to wind turbines. Such symptoms in themselves can lead to high anxiety, which can lead indirectly to extreme annoyance and sleep disturbance."

The project, which involves turbine towers spread over 25,000 acres and capable of producing 200 megawatts of electricity, is being developed by a company called sPower under the name Seneca Wind. In an email, Dan Williamson, a spokesperson for the company, disputed the claims. “The Seneca Wind project will not have any adverse health impacts on surrounding landowners,” he said. He also said that according to the company’s studies, any health effects of the project, including those from low-frequency noise, will be minimal and within state government guidelines.

“With respect to Jerry Punch’s claims regarding adverse health effects due to wind turbine noise,” Williamson wrote, “Mr. Punch’s position has been criticized by medical experts. Also, his arguments have been rejected by regulatory agencies tasked with siting wind farms.”

The two regional monopolies that provide the bulk of Michigan’s electricity have announced plans to rely more heavily on [wind farm developments](#). In recent years, such projects have stimulated intense [opposition](#) in targeted townships, in part due to potential negative [health effects](#) on residents.

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