

# Sun Journal

## Wind energy, health experts face off

By **Rebekah Metzler**, *Staff Writer*

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MANCHESTER - Wind farm developers and health experts participated in a forum before the Maine Medical Association Public Health Committee on Wednesday to discuss research on wind turbine-related health problems at MMA's headquarters in Manchester.

Weighing in were Dr. Albert Aniel, an internist at Rumford Community Hospital, Dr. Michael Nissenbaum, a radiologist at Northern Maine Medical Center, former Gov. Angus King, a partner in Independence Wind and Dr. Dora Ann Mills, director of the Maine Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the state's chief medical officer.

Aniel and Nissenbaum would like the state to place a moratorium on future wind projects until more research on the effects of turbines on people can be gathered and analyzed. Aniel sent a letter to that effect to the governor's office about a month ago.

Nissenbaum presented interviews he conducted with 15 people living near the wind farm in Mars Hill, citing examples of sleep disturbances, headaches, dizziness, hypertension, weight changes and increased prescriptions.

"The noise is made by the blade tip swinging by the tower at speeds of up to 170 mph," he said. "If turbines sync, the noise will be louder. The noise occurs just a little faster than a human heartbeat. People find this extremely annoying."

Stress was the most common symptom Nissenbaum encountered in his research. He said many of the physical reactions, such as sleep disturbance and headaches, could be related to stress caused by the sound of the turbines.

King said he has visited the Mars Hill farm and has "no doubt" that there are legitimate issues.

"I spoke to one resident, Wendy Todd," he said. "It's apparent that it's bothering her and her family. But this discussion we are having today is in reference to a statewide moratorium for all wind projects. It would be poor science to base that decision upon a group of people in Mars Hill without looking at what the differences between the projects are."

King, whose company is developing a wind farm in Roxbury, said the nearest homes to his proposed project would be three times farther away from turbines than the nearest homes to the project in Mars Hill.

"If we all agree a wind turbine in Chicago will not bother anyone in Augusta, then all we are talking about is what's the appropriate distance," he said.

With proper planning, concerns about "shadow flicker," the effect of the blades spinning through sunlight and casting flickering shadows, and sound pollution - audible and low-frequency - can be avoided, King said.

"We have a setback law, but it's expressed in decibel terms," he said. "The Maine standards for quiet, rural areas is 45 decibels, 35 inside the house, very similar to what's suggested by the World Health Organization."

The Mars Hill project does not fall under Maine rules because the state granted an exception, Mills said.

She said she became aware of health concerns around turbines when she got a call from Aniel. After conducting extensive online research, Mills said she agreed with King, that distance is the key to preventing problems.

"Research showed if you live really close and have high exposure to noise, to either high or low frequency, you will have high annoyance issues and lack of sleeping because of that," she said.

Mills said she opposes a statewide moratorium.

"We know Maine people die now from diseases caused by burning fuel," she said, adding that Maine has the highest cancer rate in the country and the highest rate of childhood asthma. "We need to figure out the proper distance for turbines, but I don't think this is an epidemic."

The committee will meet again on May 20 and is expected to make a recommendation to the full association on whether to support a wind farm moratorium.

No legislation has been filed to impose such a moratorium, and Gov. John Baldacci remains a strong proponent of developing wind projects in the state.