**DRAFT FAQ
Wind Energy Facility Siting HIA Final Report**

**What’s new?**

The Oregon Public Health Division has released the final version of its Strategic Health Impact Assessment on Wind Energy Development in Oregon. This report includes changes made in response to public comments received between Jan. 3, 2012, and March 20, 2012, on a draft version of the report.

During the three-month comment period, OPHD received more than 1,000 pages of written comments and material. The division systematically reviewed these comments, and edited the report to correct factual errors, clarify unclear points or statements, and provide additional information or context where needed. It documented changes in a Response to Public Comments report, which is also available on Oregon Public Health Division website.

**What is the Wind Energy Health Impact Assessment?**

The Wind Energy Health Impact Assessment, or HIA, is a tool to help government agencies, elected officials, community members and other stakeholders understand and respond to health-related questions about (future) wind energy developments in Oregon.

The Wind Energy HIA describes the available scientific evidence and provides health-based recommendations in five key areas that could be affected by a wind energy development: noise, visual impacts, air pollution, economic effects and community conflict.

The goal is for decision-makers and stakeholders to use the report to integrate health considerations alongside the many other factors that go into siting plans and decisions for wind energy facilities.

**What is an HIA?**

An HIA provides decision-makers with information about how any policy, program or project may affect the health of people. HIAs can complement, but are different from, Environmental Impact Assessments.

Conducting an HIA raises awareness about health in other sectors, such as land use, transportation, energy, housing and education. While projects in these sectors can have a profound effect on the health of specific communities and the general population, consideration of health has not been a routine part of decision making.

HIA is one tool that public health professionals can use to better integrate health into the programmatic, policy and funding decisions made within these sectors.

Oregon is considered a leader in conducting HIAs, performing more than 12 of the 125 that have been conducted nationwide since 1999, and Oregon has a network of more than 250 professionals who collaborate on HIAs. Increasing the use of HIAs in an effort to achieve the Public Health Division’s vision of lifelong health for all people in the state is one of the division’s priorities as outlined in its five-year strategic plan.

**What’s changed in the 2013 report?**

OPHD changed the report to correct factual errors, clarify unclear points or statements, and provide additional information or context where needed. For the most part, its key conclusions and recommendations have not changed from the draft report.

The division did not expand the scope of the document beyond the original five domains: noise, visual impacts, air pollution, economic effects, and community conflict.

**What are your next steps?**

The strategic HIA provides a framework for conducting site-specific assessments on developments in Oregon. OPHD is working with its stakeholders to identify specific projects where a focused health impact assessment could add value to the decision-making process.

**Why did you conduct this HIA?**

Wind energy development continues to grow in Oregon because of increasing energy demand, and state and federal initiatives to increase renewable energy development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote economic growth.

OPHD initiated this HIA after receiving questions from Oregon Department of Energy, Oregon residents and other stakeholders about potential health effects from wind energy facilities.

The division used Health Impact Assessment to examine this issue because it allows the division to conduct a broad and systematic assessment of potential positive and negative effects of future developments.

**Who was involved?**

This HIA was conducted by Oregon Public Health Division in consultation with a steering committee. It was funded by grants from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The steering committee had representatives from ODOE, local elected officials, county health and community development departments, the energy industry, and community members.

The steering committee helped identify major potential impacts, research questions and resources for the literature review.

The steering committee served an advisory role only, and did not have final approval over the report.

Community members provided input during three community listening sessions in Northeastern Oregon and in an online questionnaire. This community feedback helped shape the scope/areas addressed in the report. Community members also provided valuable input through the public comment process.

**What were your methods?**

In the report, the division focused on five areas: noise, visual impacts, air quality, economic impact, and community conflict.

OPHD identified research questions in each area, and turned to a wide variety of resources to answer the questions. While it focused mainly on peer-reviewed scientific literature, it also considered other sources, such as government and industry reports, community feedback, and non-technical publications.

**What did you find?**

The health effects most directly related to wind energy facilities are from noise and shadow flicker; however, wind energy facilities can also have indirect impacts through changes in air pollution, economic effects, and community conflict.

Noise from any source can affect people’s health and quality of life, and is understandably a concern at wind energy facilities. There are many factors that influence how people respond to and are affected by noise, and this makes it difficult to predict the effects of a particular noise level or source. The likelihood and magnitude of any impacts will depend on a number of factors related to the noise, environment, and individual attitudes and expectations about noise.

Based on the division’s assessment, Oregon’s ambient degradation noise standard of 36 dBA for wind energy facilities is protective of public health (i.e., it is not expected to result in annoyance, sleep disturbance or other health effects in the general population). However, landowners who waive this standard may experience noise levels that could result in sleep disturbance and moderate to serious annoyance.

Shadow flicker is unlikely to pose health risks at wind energy facilities in Oregon. This is because the setback distances required to meet Oregon’s noise standard will likely be sufficient to avoid shadow flicker impacts.

In the long-term, there could be some positive effects from reductions in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and from the economic benefits they bring to Oregon communities. The division believes any positive impacts could be maximized if people’s concerns about noise, visual impacts and fairness are taken seriously and addressed during the siting process.

**What do you recommend?**

To reduce the potential for health effects from wind turbine noise, planners and developers should evaluate and implement strategies to minimize noise generation when outdoor levels exceed Oregon’s standards for wind turbine noise.

Developers, planners and regulatory agencies should ensure that residents living near wind energy facilities understand the potential risks and benefits associated with a development, and are aware (and able) to report health issues and concerns if they choose.