Western Morning News

MORE RESEARCH NEEDED INTO TURBINE NOISE

Date : 14.10.04

Dr Amanda Harry, who has produced ground-breaking research on the effects of noise from turbines on people living near the Bears Down site explains why she is taking her investigation further

Over the last 12 months I have been concerned by the numbers of people who appear to be experiencing problems caused by noise exposure from wind turbines. This, according to the British Wind Energy Association, has not been an issue until brought up by anti-wind activists in this country.

However, I have heard from people all over this country; Cornwall, Wales and Cumbria; from France, Germany, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand and the USA who are experiencing noise problems from nearby wind turbines.

So this is not an isolated problem and from the information I have been able to gather, it is not a new problem either.

Initially I felt that the problems experienced by these people were being caused simply by the low frequency noise which is produced by the turbine blades passing the towers. But now I am sure that there are a combination of factors which makes the noise emitted from wind turbines so disturbing.

These factors include the repetitive nature of the noise being like a dripping tap, the unpredictability of the noise (we cannot tell when the wind will blow or how strongly the wind will blow), the noise levels increasing noticeably at night when nearby neighbours are trying to rest, and modulation of the sound produced by the noise interaction between turbines.

The low frequency noise and vibration adds to the distress and disturbance and makes susceptible people hypersensitive to the noise. Indeed prolonged exposure to low frequency noise and vibration is known to increase a person's sensitivity to the noise. Much research has been published showing the correlation of health problems and disturbance from noise.

Yet there has been no such research for wind turbines. An initial survey by me indicates that a problem exists and I feel this warrants further in-depth, independent research and investigation.

However, the wind industry has taken it upon themselves to state that there isn't a problem without looking into the issues further.

It is because of this that I have been working with a physicist and acoustic scientist, Dr David Manley, to try to confirm our observations. With the help of a small grant, which has been secured by the UK Noise Association, we hope we will be able to show how the character and intensity of the noise and vibration produced from wind turbines can cause a noise nuisance which can have a knock-on effect on the health of those experiencing the disturbance. My initial survey shows that the current noise measurement standards used to predict noise from wind turbines are wholly inadequate to protect neighbours of turbines from the turbine noise and should be re-evaluated and new standards drawn up with this in mind.