

Report Number 122412-1

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Revised:

**A Cooperative Measurement Survey and Analysis of  
Low Frequency and Infrasound at the Shirley Wind Farm in  
Brown County, Wisconsin**



Prepared Cooperatively By:

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Principal: Dr. Bruce Walker

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Principals: George F. and David M. Hessler

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Principal: Robert Rand

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Principal: Dr. Paul Schomer

## 1.0\_Introduction

Clean Wisconsin is a nonprofit environmental advocacy organization that works to protect Wisconsin's air and water and to promote clean energy. As such, the organization is generally supportive of wind projects. Clean Wisconsin was retained by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) to provide an independent review of a proposed wind farm called the Highlands Project to be located in St. Croix County, WI (WI PSC Docket 2535-CE-100). Clean Wisconsin in turn retained Hessler Associates, Inc. (HAI) to provide technical assistance.

During the course of the hearings, attorneys representing groups opposed to the Highlands project, presented witnesses that lived near or within the Shirley Wind project in Brown County, WI. The Shirley wind project is made up of eight Nordex100 wind turbines that is one of the turbine models being considered for the Highlands projects. These witnesses testified that they and their children have suffered severe adverse health effects to the point that they have abandoned their homes at Shirley. They attribute their problems to arrival of the wind turbines. David Hessler, while testifying for Clean Wisconsin, suggested a sound measurement survey be made at the Shirley project to investigate low frequency noise (LFN) and infrasound (0-20 Hz) in particular.

Partial funding was authorized by the PSC to conduct a survey at Shirley and permission for home entry was granted by the three homeowners. The proposed test plan called for the wind farm owner, Duke Power, to cooperate fully in supplying operational data and by turning off the units for short intervals so the true ON/OFF impact of turbine emissions could be documented. Duke Power declined this request due to the cost burden of lost generation, and the homeowners withdrew their permission at the last moment because no invited experts on their behalf were available to attend the survey.

Clean Wisconsin, their consultants and attorneys for other groups all cooperated and persisted and the survey was rescheduled for December 4 thru 7, 2012. Four acoustical consulting firms would cooperate and jointly conduct and/or observe the survey. Channel Islands Acoustics (ChIA) has derived modest income while Hessler Associates has derived significant income from wind turbine development projects. Rand Acoustics is almost exclusively retained by opponents of wind projects. Schomer and Associates have worked about equally for both proponents and opponents of wind turbine projects. However, all of the firms are pro-wind if proper siting limits for noise are considered in the project design.

The measurement survey was conducted on schedule and this report is organized to include four Appendices A thru D where each firm submitted on their own letterhead a report summarizing their findings. Based on this body of work, a consensus is formed where possible to report or opine on the following:

- Measured LFN and infrasound documentation
- Observations of the five investigators on the perception of LFN and infrasound both outside and inside the three residences.
- Observations of the five investigators on any health effects suffered during and after the 3 to 4 day exposure.
- Recommendations with two choices to the PSC for the proposed Highlands project
- Recommendations to the PSC for the existing Shirley project

## 2.0\_Testing Objectives

Bruce Walker employed a custom designed multi-channel data acquisition system to measure sound pressure in the time domain at a sampling rate of 24,000/second where all is collected under the same clock. The system is calibrated accurate from 0.1 Hz thru 10,000 Hz. At each residence, channels were cabled to an outside wind-speed anemometer and a microphone mounted on a ground plane covered with a 3 inch hemispherical wind screen that in turn was covered with an 18 inch diameter and 2 inch thick foam hemispherical dome (foam dome). Other channels inside each residence were in various rooms including basements, living or great rooms, office/study, kitchens and bedrooms. The objective of this set-up was to gather sufficient data for applying advanced signal processing techniques. See Appendix A for a Summary of this testing.

George and David Hessler employed four off-the-shelf type 1 precision sound level meter/frequency analyzers with a rated accuracy of +/- 1 dB from 5 Hz to 10,000 Hz. Two of the meters were used as continuous monitors to record statistical metrics for every 10 minute interval over the 3 day period. One location on property with permission was relatively close (200m) to a wind turbine but remote from the local road network to serve as an indicator of wind turbine load, ON/OFF times and a crude measure of high elevation wind speed. See cover photo. This was to compensate for lack of Duke Power's cooperation. The other logging meter was employed at residence R2, the residence with the closest turbines. The other two meters were used to simultaneously measure outside and inside each residence for a late night and early morning period to assess the spectral data. See Appendix B for a Summary of this testing.

Robert Rand observed measurements and documented neighbor reports and unusual negative health effects including nausea, dizziness and headache. He used a highly accurate seismometer to detect infrasonic pressure modulations from wind turbine to residence. See Appendix C for Rob's Summary.

Paul Schomer used a frequency spectrum analyzer as an oscilloscope wired into Bruce's system to detect in real time any interesting occurrences. Paul mainly circulated around observing results and questioning and suggesting measurement points and techniques. See Appendix D for Paul's Summary.

Measurements were made at three unoccupied residences labeled R1, R2 and R3 on Figure 2.1. The figure shows only the five closest wind turbines and other measurement locations. All in all, the investigators worked very well together and there is no question or dispute whatsoever about measurement systems or technique and competencies of personnel. Of course, conclusions from the data could differ. Mr. M. Hankard, acoustical consultant for the Highland and Shirley projects, accompanied, assisted and observed the investigators on Wednesday, 12/5.



**Figure 2.1:** Aerial view showing sound survey locations

The four firms wish to thank and acknowledge the extraordinary cooperation given to us by the residence owners and various attorneys.

### 3.0\_Investgator Observations

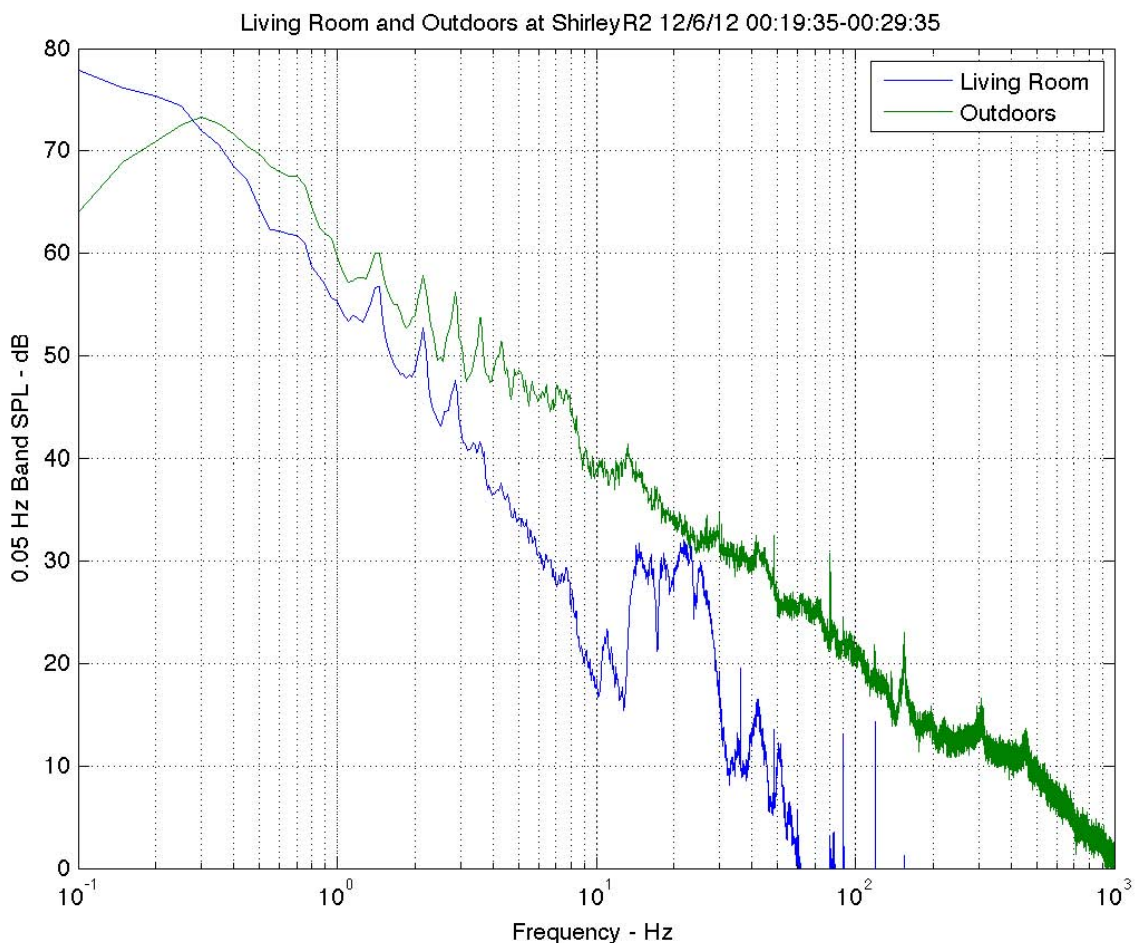
Observations from the five investigators are tabulated below: It should be noted the investigators had a relatively brief exposure compared to 24/7 occupation.

<b>AUDIBILITY OUTSIDE RESIDENCES</b>	
	<i>Observations</i>
Bruce Walker	Could detect wind turbine noise at R1, easily at R2, but not at all at R3
George Hessler	Could detect wind turbine noise at R1, easily at R2, but not at all at R3
David Hessler	Could detect wind turbine noise at R1, easily at R2, but not at all at R3
Robert Rand	Could detect wind turbine noise at all residences
Paul Schomer	Not sure at R1 but could detect wind turbine noise at R2, not at all at R3
<b>AUDIBILITY INSIDE RESIDENCES</b>	
	<i>Observations</i>
Bruce Walker	Could not detect wind turbine noise inside any home
George Hessler	Could not detect wind turbine noise inside any home
David Hessler	Could faintly detect wind turbine noise in residence R2
Robert Rand	Could detect wind turbine noise inside all three homes
Paul Schomer	Could not detect wind turbine noise inside any home
<b>EXPERIENCED HEALTH EFFECTS</b>	
	<i>Observations</i>
Bruce Walker	No effects during or after testing
George Hessler	No effects during or after testing
David Hessler	No effects during or after testing
Robert Rand	Reported ill effects (headache and/or nausea while testing and severe effects for 3+ days after testing)
Paul Schomer	No effects during or after testing

## 4.0\_Conclusions

This cooperative effort has made a good start in quantifying low frequency and infrasound from wind turbines.

Unequivocal measurements at the closest residence R2 are detailed herein showing that wind turbine noise is present outside and inside the residence. Any mechanical device has a unique frequency spectrum, and a wind turbine is simply a very very large fan and the blade passing frequency is easily calculated by  $\text{RPM}/60 \times \text{the number of blades}$ , and for this case;  $14 \text{ RPM}/60 \times 3 = 0.7 \text{ Hz}$ . The next six harmonics are 1.4, 2.1, 2.8, 3.5, 4.2 & 4.9 Hz and are clearly evident on the attached graph below. Note also there is higher infrasound and LFN inside the residence in the range of 15 to 30 Hz that is attributable to the natural flexibility of typical home construction walls. This higher frequency reduces in the basement where the propagation path is through the walls plus floor construction but the tones do not reduce appreciably.



Measurements at the other residences R1 and R3 do not show this same result because the increased distance reduced periodic turbine noise closer to the background and/or turbine loads at the time of these measurements resulted in reduced acoustical emission. Future testing should be sufficiently extensive to cover overlapping turbine conditions to determine the decay rate with distance for this ultra low frequency range, or the magnitude of measurable wind turbine noise with distance.

The critical questions are what physical effects do these low frequencies have on residents and what LFN limits, if any, should be imposed on wind turbine projects. The reported response at residence R2 by the wife and their child was extremely adverse while the husband suffered no ill effects whatsoever, illustrating the complexity of the issue. The family moved far away for a solution.

A most interesting study in 1986 by the Navy reveals that physical vibration of pilots in flight simulators induced motion sickness when the vibration frequency was in the range of 0.05 to 0.9 Hz with the maximum (worst) effect being at about 0.2 Hz, not too far from the blade passing frequency of future large wind turbines. If one makes the leap from physical vibration of the body to physical vibration of the media the body is in, it suggests adverse response to wind turbines is an acceleration or vibration problem in the very low frequency region.

The four investigating firms are of the opinion that enough evidence and hypotheses have been given herein to classify LFN and infrasound as a serious issue, possibly affecting the future of the industry. It should be addressed beyond the present practice of showing that wind turbine levels are magnitudes below the threshold of hearing at low frequencies.

## 5.0\_Recommendations

### 5.1\_General

We recommend additional study on an urgent priority basis, specifically:

- A comprehensive literature search far beyond the search performed here under time constraints.
- A retest at Shirley to determine the decay rate of ultra low frequency wind turbine sound with distance with a more portable system for measuring nearly simultaneously at the three homes and at other locations.
- A Threshold of Perception test with participating and non-participating Shirley residents.

### 5.2\_For the Highlands Project

ChIA and Rand do not have detail knowledge of the Highland project and refrain from specific recommendations. They agree in principle to the conclusions offered herein in Section 4.0.

Hessler Associates has summarized their experience with wind turbines to date in a peer-reviewed Journal<sup>1</sup> and have concluded that adverse impact is minimized if a design goal of 40 dBA (long term average) is maintained at all residences, at least at all non-participating residences. To the best of their knowledge, essentially no annoyance complaints and certainly no severe health effect complaints, as reported at Shirley, have been made known to them for *all* projects designed to this goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Hessler G., & David, M., "Recommended noise level design goals and limits at residential receptors for wind turbine developments in the United States", Noise Control Engineering Journal, 59(1), Jan-Feb 2011

Schomer and Associates, using an entirely different approach have concluded that a design goal of 39 dBA is adequate to minimize impact, at least for an audible noise impact. In fact, a co-authored paper<sup>2</sup> is planned for an upcoming technical conference in Montreal, Canada.

Although there is no explicit limit for LFN and infrasound in these A-weighted sound levels above, the spectral shape of wind turbines is known and the C-A level difference will be well below the normally accepted difference of 15 to 20 dB. It may come to be that this metric is not adequate for wind turbine work but will be used for the time being.

Based on the above, Hessler Associates recommends approval of the application if the following Noise condition is placed on approval:

With the Hessler recommendation, the long-term-average (2 week sample) design goal for sound emissions attributable to the array of wind turbines, exclusive of the background ambient, at all non-participating residences shall be 39.5 dBA or less.

Schomer and Associates recommends that the additional testing listed in 5.3 be done at Shirley on a very expedited basis with required support by Duke Energy prior to making a decision on the Highlands project. It is essential to know whether or not some individuals can perceive the wind turbine operation at R1 or R3. With proper resources and support, these studies could be completed by late February or early March. If a decision cannot be postponed, then Schomer and Associates recommends a criterion level of 33.5 dB. The Navy's prediction of the nauseogenic region (Schomer Figure 6 herein) indicates a 6 dB decrease in the criterion level for a doubling of power such as from 1.25 MW to 2.5 MW.

With the Schomer recommendation, and in the presence of a forced decision, the long-term-average (2 week sample) design goal for sound emissions attributable to the array of wind turbines, exclusive of the background ambient, at all non-participating residences shall be 33.5 dBA or less.

There is one qualifier to this recommendation. The Shirley project is unique to the experience of the two firms in that the Nordex100 turbines are very high rated units (2.5 MW) essentially not included in our past experiences. HAI has completed just one project, ironically named the Highlands project in another state that uses both Nordex 90 and Nordex 100 units in two phases. There is a densely occupied Town located 1700 feet from the closest Nordex 100 turbine. The president and managers of the wind turbine company report "no noise issues at the site".

Imposing a noise limit of less than 45 dBA will increase the buffer distances from turbines to houses or reduce the number of turbines so that the Highlands project will *not* be an exact duplication of the Shirley project. For example, the measured noise level at R2 is approximately 10 dBA higher than the recommendation resulting in a subjective response to audible outside noise as twice as loud. Measured levels at R1 and R3 would comply with the recommendation.

We understand that the recommended goal is lower than the limit of 45 dBA now legislated, and may make the project economically unviable. In this specific case, it seems justified to the two firms to be conservative (one more than the other) to avoid a duplicate project to Shirley at Highlands because there is no technical reason to believe the community response would be different.

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<sup>2</sup> Schomer, P. & Hessler, G., "Criteria for wind-turbine noise immissions", ICA, Montreal, Canada 2013



### 5.3\_For the Shirley Project

The completed testing was extremely helpful and a good start to uncover the cause of such severe adverse impact reported at this site. The issue is complex and relatively new. Such reported adverse response is sparse or non-existent in the peer-reviewed literature. At least one accepted paper at a technical conference<sup>3</sup> has been presented. There are also self-published reports on the internet along with much erroneous data based on outdated early wind turbine experience.

A serious literature search and review is needed and is strongly recommended. Paul Schomer, in the brief amount of time for this project analysis, has uncovered some research that *may* provide a probable cause or direction to study for the reported adverse health effects. We could be close to identifying a documented cause for the reported complaints but it involves much more serious impartial effort.

An important finding on this survey was that the cooperation of the wind farm operator is absolutely essential. Wind turbines must be measured both ON and OFF on request to obtain data under nearly identical wind and power conditions to quantify the wind turbine impact which could not be done due to Duke Power's lack of cooperation.

We strongly recommend additional testing at Shirley. The multi-channel simultaneous data acquisition system is normally deployed within a mini-van and can be used to measure immissions at the three residences under the identical or near identical wind and power conditions. In addition, seismic accelerometer and dedicated ear-simulating microphones can be easily accommodated. And, ON/OFF measurements require the cooperation of the operator.

Since the problem may be devoid of audible noise, we also recommend a test as described by Schomer in Appendix D to develop a "Threshold of Perception" for wind turbine emissions.



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Bruce Walker



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George F. Hessler Jr.



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David M. Hessler



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Robert Rand



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Paul Schomer

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<sup>3</sup> Ambrose, S. E., Rand, R. W., Krogh, C. M., "Falmouth, Massachusetts wind turbine infrasound and low frequency noise measurements", Proceedings of Inter-Noise 2012, New York, NY, August 19-22.