

## Farmer: Wind turbine fire in rural Western New York caused contamination to family, livestock, and land

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### Fiberglass particles drifted downwind during the Rexville fire

By Andrew Harris

The scenes were amazing from the recent fire on the Steuben-Allegany county line. A massive wind turbine was on fire, hundreds of feet in the air, black smoke billowing out of the blaze.

It was obvious that the turbine was destroyed and the fire burned out after being on fire for hours. What wasn't obvious was what the fire was burning into the wind ... fiberglass.

The family downwind and nearby the fire say they have been impacted. According to multiple sources, several family members have been exposed to airborne fiberglass: Livestock are affected and croplands are contaminated. There are up to six property owners who may have been affected. One is a retired Navy officer.

Local landowners will be gathering to address the Town of West Union government on April 20 to explain what damages they have incurred due to the fire.

News of the collateral damage has already impacted neighboring Town of Independence (Whitesville, Willing, Shongo). Independence Town Supervisor Jeri Riechman told the Wellsville Sun the town is taking another look at the local law.

"Although we do not have any windmill projects on our radar, we plan to contact our attorney to discuss revisions to our current law," Riechman said. "The windmill fire in West Union has brought to light lots of issues that no one anticipated."

Wind turbine fires are becoming more common as electric energy demands increase across the nation. In order to meet current goals for converting to electric energy, expect more windmills to arrive on the landscape of rural New York. Local governments seem to be superceded by state policy when it comes to wind policy. They really can't stop a wind farmer from making a deal with a landowner, but they can demand more security from developers.

'Bonding' is likely to be a central issue for both local governments and landowners. These multi-million dollar projects, be them solar, wind, or pipeline; require the developer to insure against disaster or pay for deconstruction. Before the project gets completed, the bond as required by law must be in place and remain in place during ownership. Should the pipeline explode, or the wind turbine fall over, or the solar field be abandoned, proper funding for clean up must already be in place before the project starts. Often that the bond issued to secure a project is not adequate in a worst case scenario like what many have deemed the, "Rexville Fire."

In many cases, still to be determined in the Rexville fire, that bonding is only a fraction of what is needed by a community or landowner to recover losses. Those who have warned against the proliferation of wind projects have been waving this red flag for years. The reason that bonding remains such a key issue lies in the conflict that local governments find themselves in.

A local planning board member, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of potential litigation, gave perspective on why increasing bond rates isn't so simple.

"The problem is that with taxes skyrocketing, the government wants more money and the landowners need more money for taxes," the board member said. "Thus, nobody wants higher bonds."

We don't know the scope or scale of collateral damage as a result of this Rexville wind fire yet. The Wellsville Sun has learned landowners are being advised not to speak to the press until the April 20 meeting at the West Union Town Hall.

NextEra Energy is the owner of the wind turbine that was destroyed by the fire and reportedly caused damages. On their website they are described as:

"NextEra Energy Resources, together with its affiliated entities, is **the world's largest generator of renewable energy from the wind and sun** based on 2022 megawatt hours produced on a net generation basis, and a world leader in battery storage."

The issue of wind energy has been on the minds of Allegany County leaders and landowners.

In 2021, a group of landowners hosted an informational meeting with Elmira-based lawyer Chris Denton.

You can read more about that event and some of the warnings Denton provided the crowd who attended below in this Wellsville Sun story.

Also worthwhile background reading is our [reporting on the letter that State Senator George Borrello sent the then, Allegany County Chairman Curt Crandall](#).

[Wind farming draws investors and concerns from landowners in Allegany County](#)

The meeting on April 20, at 7 p.m. at the West Union Town Hall on Route 248 in the hamlet of Rexville is open to the public.