<https://www.michigancapitolconfidential.com/msu-pulls-down-windmill-safety-guidelines-after-industry-complains>

# [MSU Pulls Down Windmill Safety Guidelines After Industry Complains](https://www.michigancapitolconfidential.com/msu-pulls-down-windmill-safety-guidelines-after-industry-complains)

## Surprised Extension Service staffers at center of conflict between industry and targeted communities

By [Evan Carter](https://www.michigancapitolconfidential.com/bio.aspx?ID=772) | Oct. 9, 2017 |

The Michigan State University Extension Service pulled from its website a model zoning ordinance for wind energy developments after industry executives and lobbyists complained that its safety standards would impede wind farm development.

The ordinance was contained in a pamphlet that was posted in March 2017 and pulled down later in the spring. MSU then posted a [revised version](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/uploads/resources/pdfs/WindEnergy_MSUExtension_LandUseSeries.pdf) on Aug. 24. The recommendations in that version would allow for turbines and their towers to be located closer to property lines, where they might have a greater effect on neighbors.

University officials pulled down the original version of the zoning recommendations after they were contacted by an attorney for the country’s largest wind and solar energy company. An article [posted](http://www.aweablog.org/planners-flyer-gets-misinterpreted-university-recommendation-thwart-new-wind-farms/) in April on the website of a wind industry trade group described some of the original MSU recommendations as “wholly unworkable.”

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MSU’s actions come as developers seek to cash in on a mandate imposed by the Legislature in 2016, which has led to conflicts in Michigan communities targeted for wind farm development. The [new law](http://michiganvotes.org/RollCall.aspx?ID=736714) increases by 50 percent the amount of renewable energy that utilities must use, which in Michigan means more wind turbines.

In May, voters in Huron County [defeated](http://www.michigansthumb.com/news/article/Voters-say-no-to-more-wind-development-11116608.php) permissive windmill zoning proposals by a vote of nearly two to one. Residents in Isabella County have complained about conflicts of interest involving zoning officials who stand to receive [thousand of dollars](http://www.michigancapitolconfidential.com/elected-officials-stand-to-get-thousands-from-wind-deals-if-zoning-approved%22%20%5Ct%20%22) in annual tower lease income and are now considering permissive zoning amendments related to wind farms.

[Similar stories](http://www.michigancapitolconfidential.com/features/search/?text=wind+turbine&site=MCC&sort=date&count=100" \t ") are coming out of other communities targeted for industrial wind farm developments covering tens of thousands of acres.

The original MSU Extension Service [pamphlet](http://iiccusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/MSU_2017_WindEnergyZoning.pdf) released March 6 was written by staff member Kurt Schindler and reviewed by Brad Neumann, also on the MSU staff. Their work was reviewed by Richard Wilson, an attorney who represented Consumers Energy, a major player in the expansion of wind farm developments in Michigan.

The original version recommended that wind turbines and towers have a 2,500-foot property line setback. The recommended setbacks in the revised version are less than half this distance, potentially allowing spinning turbine blades in greater proximity to neighbors’ homes.

MSU spokesman Jason Cody said the example cited in the original document could be misinterpreted as a recommendation rather than a discussion point, which was the author’s intention.

The revised pamphlet also allows for much louder turbine operations. The extension service originally recommended that the “sound pressure level shall not exceed 40 dB (A) measured at the property lines or the lease unit boundary.” The revised version suggests that local governments allow wind farms to operate at up to 55 decibels. It also uses a more lenient measurement method that allows this noise level as close as 100 feet from a dwelling.

In a May 22 email to Neumann, Matthew Wagner, a manager of renewable energy developments for the utility company DTE, blasted the noise standards in the original pamphlet.

“In light of our questions in this matter, we asked our own expert on acoustics to weigh in,” Wagner said. “His review of only the acoustical aspects of this document indicates there are serious flaws with the MSU Extension document’s content – and call into question the document’s validity on the whole.”

According to Neumann, the original document was removed from the MSU website because some at MSU believed it needed more technical accuracy and that it was being misinterpreted.

On April 19, Neumann and Schindler received an email from David Ivan, who works at another arm of the MSU Extension called the Greening Michigan Institute. Ivan announced that he had asked that the original version of the study be pulled from the website until “we have a chance to add some of those qualifies [sic] we discussed.”

According to Ivan, he discussed the pamphlet with an attorney representing Florida-based NextEra Energy, one of the nation’s largest wind farm developers. The company is heavily involved in the current Michigan wind farm expansion. Ivan wrote in an email to Neumann that he told the attorney “that we will certainly listen to their perspective but that does not guarantee that some, or any, of their concerns will be incorporated in the edits.”

On April 20, Schindler sent an email to his MSU colleagues; he said he was surprised that the document was being questioned by wind industry interests.

“Actually I expected to hear from the anti-wind energy folks,” Schindler said in the email. “The industry is not whom I expected to hear from since they had such a large role in the development of the sample zoning in the first place.”

One local government official suspects that the original study was pulled down due to industry pressure.

“Kurt presented this very ‘article’ to us in a public meeting in Sanilac County a few weeks ago,” Bridgehampton Township Supervisor Leo Sonck wrote. “His ‘article’ was very clear, and for once the recommendations or suggestions were actually in line with doing what is right for everyone, not just for the [wind energy] developers.”

The MSU Extension Service is an arm of MSU that “identifies and solves farm, home, and community problems through the practical application of research findings.” Lawmakers approved a $29.2 million appropriation for it in the [current state budget](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/%28S%28a43sz1ksrhs3003gwmarkgqs%29%29/mileg.aspx?page=getobject&objectname=2017-HB-4313), a 2 percent increase over the previous year.

The emails used in this story were received in response a Freedom of Information Act request submitted to MSU by Mason County Planning Commissioner Cary Shineldecker.