



## DWEA Briefing Paper: **Small Turbine Safety**

### **Small Wind Turbines Are Safe**

Despite the maturing industry, small wind turbines are sometimes perceived as new features on our landscape. As a result, concerns about their safety are often raised when small wind turbines are proposed or installed on a neighboring property. Typically, these concerns stem from a lack of familiarity with, and understanding about, the technology. Historically, properly installed small wind turbines—which are, in fact, not a new technology—have proven to be very safe. For example, there are no documented instances of turbine-related injury or death of a “civilian” in the United States in the past 33 years, the beginning of the “modern” small wind turbine era. Trees and other structures carry greater inherent danger to individuals and property than does a small wind turbine.

### **The Internet and Media**

The internet and other media can be valuable conduits for information, but they can also distort, misrepresent or neglect key information in their reporting. Language such as “blowing up” “shooting flames” and “spinning out of control” gets attention and sells papers, but does nothing to accurately portray wind turbines. Often, this lends credibility to NIMBY’s and others who use fear and misinformation as tools of opposition to small wind. Corrections can be made and even printed, but they typically do not garner the same headlines as sensational stories. So true or not, once the information is out there, it’s out there... and it gets referenced as fact. Be sure to maintain perspective when reading an article or surfing the internet for information about small wind. Always check the sources. Just as it is unreasonable to label all airplanes unsafe because of an article or video about a plane crash, it is also unreasonable to deem all wind turbines dangerous because a problem or incident was reported in the paper or posted on the internet.

### **Assuring Safety**

There are well-documented practices that can be followed to help ensure the safety of small wind turbines. When proper practices are not followed during construction, or when regular maintenance is neglected, any inherently safe technology can become unsafe. Wind turbines are no exception. Building codes exist to provide guidelines for ensuring safety of structures. Small wind turbine towers and foundations are engineered to withstand expected loads, and wind turbines themselves are designed, and even certified, to national and international standards for safety. Additionally, because wind turbines represent a significant investment to the owner, the likelihood that it will fall into disrepair is small. DWEA understands the importance of proper installation and maintenance of small wind turbines and supports the reasonable requirements to follow building and electrical codes consistent with other construction projects. DWEA also supports the inclusion of a reasonable decommissioning clause in the zoning ordinance or conditional use permit should the small wind turbine fall into disrepair. Turbine systems that pose legitimate safety hazards should be promptly repaired or removed, just as any other public hazard.