

What would happen if a windmill caught fire in our woodland forests?

Craig Bakay

REPORTER

editorial@theheritageemc.ca



Column — You know something we don't seem to have heard much about in the great debates over windmills farms in our area — windmill fires.

Now, of course the good folks advocating the installation of windmill farms aren't going to bring it up. They have enough concerns from potential neighbours that they don't want another thing muddying the waters.

But a story in the London Daily Mail recently suggests that there are about 120 windmill fires every year. The industry claims that there are only about 12. The figures were compiled by engineers at Imperial College London and Edinburgh University.

"The researchers claim that out of 200,000 turbines world-wide, 117 fires take place annually," the newspaper reported.

OK, so there are always two

sides to every story but even if the number is somewhere in the middle, it still seems like a significant risk.

Now, granted that there are windmills all over Europe and the number that catch fire is small compared to the total number of windmills.

But Eastern Ontario is not Europe (not that the Europeans have such a great track record on taking care of the environment anyways).

For one thing, there aren't the great forests in Europe like there are here. And think about it. If a windmill catches fire on a beach in Holland, what is there around it to burn?

But if a windmill in the bush 40 clicks from the Plevna fire station catches fire . . . we're talking raging inferno before anybody can even get to it to start spraying water.

Add to this the wind factor, as in fanning the flames.

Can anybody reasonably argue the winds wouldn't whip up a forest fire when the reason they put these things where they do is because there's already plenty of wind there?

The thing is that wind turbines

have a lot of highly flammable materials such as hydraulic oil and plastics in close proximity to machinery and electrical wires. If the machinery is faulty or overheats . . .

Granted the industry takes great pains to prevent fires in their turbines. The beasts cost a lot to put up in the first place and once they're up and running, they generate a ton of revenue that industry officials would be reluctant to part with.

But the best laid plans of mice and men . . .

And the thing is, it would only take one forest fire to make a mess of things in Northern Frontenac County, or Lanark, or L & A.

Because unlike wind farms on European beaches, with all the fuel at hand in an Ontario forest, how long would it take for one blown burning turbine to ignite another, and another and another?

We all want to save the planet and be good to the environment and, yes, wind power seems like a good alternative source of energy.

But it also sounds like wind farms in forests could be a disaster just waiting to happen.