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Subject: accidents constantly happen

[Wind Watch: Wind taken out of sails](#)



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Wind taken out of sails

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In the litany of “Not In My Backyard” complaints from neighbors of wind turbine installations — the noise, the strobe-like shadows cast on homes, the annoyance of birds and possibly fish, it seems one has been forgotten — the danger of the propellers falling off.

Well, it has now happened and delivers a shiny black eye to those who are promoting alternative energy sources. While caution is called for, these missteps should not ultimately deter those who are seeking to use more “green” energy technology.

Last month, three fiberglass blades ranging in weight from 265 to 290 pounds flew off the tower of the turbine at James Knoeller’s Christmas Tree Farm in the Forked River section of Lacey. Around the same time, cracks in the blades of an identical turbine tower at Argos Farms, also in Forked River, were detected and shut down.

The incidents prompted an investigation by the state Office of Clean Energy, which is freezing applications for its Renewable Energy Incentive Program wind project until officials know why the blades at Knoeller’s farm came off. The investigation is ongoing. Apparently the answer is more complicated than a loose bolt. And if this weren’t so dangerous, it would almost be laughable.

But the wayward propellers presented a real threat. Knoeller’s 17-year-old granddaughter was working with horses near the tower when the blades flew off. “One of them nearly hit her,” Knoeller said. “One of the blades was found 215 feet away.”

So it is understandable that all 37 similar projects now in the works have been put on hold by the state. The suspension, unfortunately, comes at a time when several Ocean County communities — including Long Beach Township, Waretown and Ocean Gate — are considering wind projects or reviewing municipal regulations concerning installation of windmills.

For Knoeller, the troubles started well before the catastrophic failure of the blades.

“The most disappointing aspect of this project prior to the blades falling off was the electric production was only 25 percent of what I was told I was going to get by Skylands Renewable Energy,” he said. Knoeller and Martin purchased their turbines from the same manufacturer, Kansas-based Enertech. The towers were installed by Skylands Renewable Energy LLC of Hampton.