

# Clean Wisconsin

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**Op-Ed: Wind Ban is Jobs Killer**

**By: Keith Reopelle**

A special session bill recently proposed by Governor Scott Walker includes many provisions that could hurt Wisconsin's economy and environment, but one of the most perplexing proposals in this package is a new regulation that would effectively ban wind energy projects in Wisconsin.

The regulatory reform bill proposed by Gov. Walker would close Wisconsin's doors to clean, renewable wind power and cost our state thousands of jobs. Our state legislators – who were elected on the promise of real job creation and economic recovery – should reject Gov. Walker's bill.

The proposed bill creates regulations that effectively prohibit wind energy developers from constructing a wind turbine within 1800 feet of the nearest property line. If approved, this law will make siting a wind farm so difficult that no wind developer will even bother trying; especially when Illinois and Iowa are waiting with open arms, having no setback provision at all.

The bill will immediately jeopardize 11 proposed wind projects that are set to create hundreds of jobs and undoubtedly many others in the planning stages.

Beyond killing current projects, this law would ensure that no new wind development companies or wind turbine manufacturers locate in Wisconsin, and result in the loss of thousands more jobs constructing and maintaining wind turbines.

Wind energy production is one of the world's fastest growing industries. In 2010, the industry employed over 85,000 people nationally. In Wisconsin, the wind industry supports thousands of jobs at businesses like Tower Tech in Manitowoc and Renewegy in Oshkosh. Both companies produce parts for wind turbines. Tower Tech produced its first turbine in 2005 and now employs over 250 people at its plant where it offers competitive wages and good benefits.

By effectively banning wind energy construction in the state, this law would leave manufacturing companies like Tower Tech with far less incentive to develop in Wisconsin.

These more restrictive regulations would replace rules that the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) recently approved after two years of study, six rounds of public comments, and input from all major stakeholder groups.

During this process, an advisory group including businesses, local officials, health professionals and homeowners spent countless hours crafting rules that strike a compromise between promoting the development of clean, renewable wind energy and protecting the interests of neighboring landowners. These rules are some of the most onerous for wind developers in the nation, but they won't kill off the industry.

Unlike the proposed legislation, the common-sense rule package approved by the PSC strikes a balance that protects the interests of property owners while allowing for the development of safe wind farms.

The proposed wind ban also directly rejects Wisconsin voters' desire to see increased wind power in the state. A bipartisan poll conducted in February of 2010 by Public Opinion Strategies, a leading Republican pollster, found that 82 percent of Wisconsin voters support increasing wind to meet the state's future energy needs.

Wind power is a clean, renewable source of energy that already employs thousands of people in Wisconsin, and holds the potential to create thousands more new jobs. This opportunity will be lost should the regulatory reform bill become law.

With thousands of jobs and the health of our economy and environment at stake, Wisconsin legislators should reject the regulatory reform bill proposed by Governor Walker.

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*Keith Reopelle is the senior policy director at Clean Wisconsin, the state's largest environmental advocacy organization.*