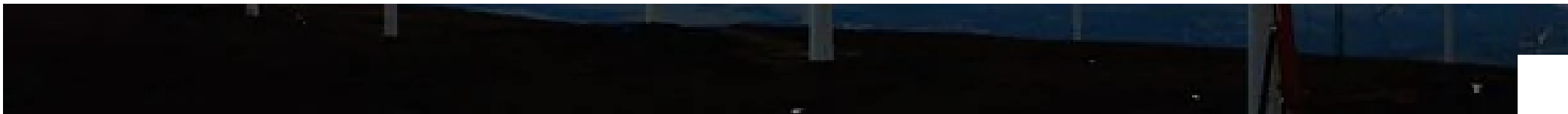


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1,500 accidents and incidents on UK wind farms

The wind energy industry has admitted that 1,500 accidents and other incidents have taken place on wind farms over the past five years.

By Edward Malnick And Robert Mendick *and* Robertmendick

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The figures – released by RenewableUK, the industry's trade body – include four deaths and a further 300 injuries to workers.

The scale of incidents – equivalent to almost one a day – emerges following the publication of dramatic photographs showing one turbine which had crashed to the ground in a field near a road and another exploding into flames, caused by 150mph winds which buffeted Scotland and northern England last week.

Charles Anglin, RenewableUK's director of communications, stressed that last week's incidents were caused by "freak weather". The organisation said that no member of the public had ever been hurt as a result of a wind turbine accident.

A dossier of incidents, compiled by a campaign group opposed to wind farms, includes cases where blades, each weighing as much as 14 tonnes, have sheared off and crashed to the ground.

Residents living near a wind farm have reported sheltering in their homes when lumps of ice were thrown from blades from a 410-ft

high turbine near Peterborough, Cambridgeshire.

One manufacturer of wind turbines admitted one of its models had a defect – understood to be caused by a faulty braking system that meant the blades could fly off – that led to hundreds of turbines being ordered to be shut down in September by the Health and Safety Executive.

The company, Proven Energy Ltd, based in Scotland, went into receivership shortly after.

Blades attached to smaller domestic wind turbines have also become detached and hit buildings – in one case penetrating the roof of a cabin used as an office.

Campaigners claim that the incidents show that "some parts of the country are too windy for turbines". Most turbines automatically shut down when the wind speed rises above 56mph because at that speed they can become unsafe.

In September a blade flew off a wind turbine on the roof of a new car park at Lister hospital in Stevenage, Hertfordshire, hitting a staff member's car.

Last year a 140-turbine wind farm near Glasgow was temporarily shut down after a 14-tonne fibreglass blade broke off in windy conditions and landed at the base of its tower.

Two years ago, a 50ft turbine collapsed in the playground of a school on the Island of Raasay off the coast of Scotland, and in the same year a blade on a 190 ft wind turbine in Rotherham owned by Sheffield University broke in strong winds, prompting an investigation by its manufacturers.

The incidents were compiled by the Caithness Wind Farm Information Forum, which campaigns against turbines in Scotland and publishes accidents - backed up by media reports - on its website.

RenewableUK said the deaths had been recorded in 2009 and 2010.

One involved a maintenance worker in Scotland who had become 'tangled' with the driveshaft of a turbine while the other three deaths took place during construction of onshore and offshore wind farms.

Chris Streatfeild, RenewableUK's director of health and safety, said: "No members of the public have ever been injured or harmed in the reports we have received.

"The risk to the public is one in 100 million. You are much more likely to be injured by a lightning strike than by a wind turbine."

Mr Streatfeild said RenewableUK had recorded 1,500 incidents over the past five years, many of which were very minor. Of those, about 18 per cent - or close to 300 incidents - led to an injury, again usually very minor.

He said planning and safety rules meant turbines were always at a certain minimum distance from roads and homes, reducing further the risk to the public. He said the number of fires and structural collapse each amounted to just a 'handful'.

Mr Anglin said last week that wind farms had an "excellent health and safety record", adding: "In stressful situations any power equipment may develop faults, and that's true of gas, nuclear, oil, and is also true of wind."

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) said last week it was "extremely difficult" to assemble a "complete picture of reported incidents at wind farms" because accidents are not recorded by industry type.

The HSE said its figures showed three fatal accidents between 2007/08 and 2009/10 and a total of 53 major or dangerous incidents in the same time frame.

An HSE spokesman said wind turbines were classed as machines rather than buildings or structures and that there was no obligation to report mechanical failures.

Angela Kelly, chairman of the Country Guardian, a national network of anti-wind farm campaigns, said: “We have been aware of accidents on wind farms for years but the new figures released by the industry’s own trade body are particularly alarming.

“Developers seem to have ignored the fact that some parts of the country are too windy for turbines.”



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