

FAA: Turbines pose risk to radar

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The Federal Aviation Administration issued a report yesterday warning that Cape Wind Associates' proposed wind farm could interfere with radar systems monitoring air traffic over Nantucket Sound.

The FAA's "Notice of Presumed Hazard" warns that the 130 proposed turbines could have an "adverse physical or electromagnetic interference effect upon navigable airspace or air navigation facilities."

The report warns the rotating blades of the turbines could cause unwanted "clutter" in radar systems.

To correct the problem, the FAA study recommends an upgrade of the radar system located at the Massachusetts Military Reservation, where regional air traffic control is conducted.

The estimated cost of the upgrade at the military base is \$1.5 million.

If the upgrade at the military base did not work, the FAA would require Cape Wind to construct a new radar facility, with an estimated price tag of \$12 million to \$15 million.

The FAA will continue studying the issue and working with Cape Wind, FAA spokesman Jim Peters said yesterday.

Mark Rodgers, spokesman for Cape Wind Associates, said the radar concerns can be addressed.

When asked whether the cost of radar improvements would be prohibitive to the wind farm project, Rodgers said he could not comment in detail because Cape Wind has just found out about the potential added cost for the project.

But he said Cape Wind could work with the FAA to alleviate the federal agency's concerns.

"We're confident that in the weeks to come we'll be able to resolve this issue successfully, and sometime within the year we'll be able to get a 'No Hazard' determination," Rodgers said.

The Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, a nonprofit group opposed to the Nantucket Sound wind farm plan, hailed the FAA report yesterday as proof that the proposed turbines pose a public safety threat in an area dense with low-flying aircraft.

"Radar interference is a very significant issue," Alliance Executive Director Audra Parker said. "And it's one we've raised a number of times."

Although the FAA report states radar improvements could eliminate safety concerns, Parker said the FAA researchers may be relying too heavily on high-altitude flights.

In the coming months, as the FAA's research continues, the agency should look more carefully at keeping low-flying planes safe, she said.

Last month, Cape Wind took a key step forward when the U.S. Minerals Management Service issued an environmental report finding few negative impacts from the proposed wind farm. The MMS report has not been finalized.