

Data Centers 101

They're Coming Regardless - Regulate, Don't Retreat.

Memphis & West Tennessee Union Strong Labor Education - laboreducation.org

~80 yrs

around since ENIAC,
the first computer (1946)

4.4%

of ALL U.S. electricity
used by data centers (2023)

Up to 12%

projected share of U.S.
power by 2028 (DOE)

5M gal

water a large center
can use in ONE day

What Is a Data Center?

Think of a giant warehouse full of computers instead of people or products. Every time you send a text, watch Netflix, use ChatGPT, check your bank account, or store photos in the cloud, your information travels to and from a data center. You make a request, the servers find the answer, and it's back on your phone in seconds.

5 Ways They Can Impact Our Community

- ELECTRICITY** A large center can use as much power as a small city - straining the grid and, without planning, raising everyday ratepayers' bills.
- WATER** Mid-size centers use 300,000-500,000 gallons a day for cooling (about 1,000 homes). The biggest use millions - stressing supplies in droughts.
- NOISE** Massive cooling fans hum 24 hours a day, plus regular backup-generator testing that neighbors can hear.
- LAND** They need huge tracts of land. Without planning, communities lose green space, farmland and wildlife habitat.
- GENERATORS** Backup diesel/gas generators pollute the air when tested or run - this is exactly where permits matter most.

THIS IS ALREADY HAPPENING IN MEMPHIS

xAI's "Colossus" facilities ran dozens of gas turbines WITHOUT Clean Air Act permits near Boxtown. The EPA ruled against the exemption in Jan 2026, and the NAACP sued. Oversight and community input matter - right here at home.

Regulate - Don't Retreat. Good Rules Require:

- Environmental impact studies first
- Energy-efficient designs
- Noise controls and sound barriers
- Air pollution limits on generators
- Limits on water use
- Renewable energy where practical
- Stormwater management
- Community input before approval

LEARN MORE - SCAN THE CODE

- Read the full fact-checked guide with sources
- See the 5 questions your local officials should be asking
- Share it with a neighbor before the next public meeting

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