

The Price of Convenience

If you had to choose between clean drinking water or getting all of your homework answers correct, which would you choose? This question will soon be a reality that all of Fort Wayne will have to face if they allow AI data centers in our city. AI is actively ruining the lives of thousands of Americans, and you're probably contributing to it without even knowing. AI is rooted in everything we do; from social media chatbots to homework cheats, and even a simple Google search now unnecessarily requires AI to work. The problem with AI is more than just its lack of environmental sustainability; it's about a systematic issue that has existed in America for as long as it's been a country. AI data centers are deliberately placed in low-income minority neighborhoods. This might not sound like an issue, but think about this happening in your city. This will and currently is the reality for some residents in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Until AI datacenters can find a way to be more environmentally friendly, it shouldn't be left unregulated, and we shouldn't allow them in Fort Wayne.

There's been a lot of talk about AI datacenters, but not much explaining about what they are and how they impact us as Americans. Datacenters are nothing new; we've had datacenters in this country for as long as we have had the internet. It's the new AI addition to these datacenters that makes them so much worse for us and the environment. Datacenters are just as they seem: centers for holding virtual data. While this is relatively easy to do for most social media apps, when AI gets involved, the systems become overloaded and require more assistance and resources to work properly. This help usually comes in the form of more cooling and water needed for the whole system. The most common complaint you tend to hear about data centers is that they use up large amounts of water. While this is true, data centers do far more damage than just that. They use large amounts of electricity, which helps contribute to the large, growing issue of climate change. They do this by releasing increasing amounts of CO2 emissions and fossil fuels. In 2023 alone, data centers in the US used over 176 terawatt-hours of electricity. That is about the same amount as the maxed-out power grid of Ireland. Due to the increased number of data centers in Virginia, two-thirds of the world's internet traffic passes through the state (Wroth). These data centers

need more energy and electricity to work once they involve AI, and the way they do that harms the environment. The more electricity they use, the more carbon emissions they produce. This is irreversible damage being done to the environment that we need to get a handle on before it gets any worse.

Another growing concern with AI data centers is the noise pollution it creates. The diesel generators that are needed for the more advanced AI storage have been reported as creating a persistent humming noise that is disruptive to entire neighborhoods. The humming, created by the data centers, is as loud as a chainsaw according to the residents who live nearby. Just hearing 65 decibels for prolonged exposure is enough to disrupt a person's sleep, increase stress and blood pressure, and have a negative cognitive effect. This constant humming noise is not only enough to disrupt a person's sleep-wake cycle, but it's enough to decrease the property value. This noise is also damaging to the nearby wildlife and ecosystems trying to live near it. (*"Communities Are Raising Noise Pollution Concerns about Data Centers"*). Many residents living near these data centers have reported having problems selling their house due to the noise and pollution. Since the noise coming from data centers varies in frequency, it isn't possible to get a good reading on how many decibels this is. Being unable to do this is what stops residents from being able to call in a complaint for noise pollution.

Interestingly enough, there have also been claims of discrimination when it comes to the location of these data centers. Many have claimed that the AI data centers have been put into predominantly low-income and minority neighborhoods on purpose. In California, research from *The Kapor Foundation* has shown that AI data centers are put more in poverty-stricken, minority neighborhoods than white neighborhoods. The areas of Hawthorne and Los Angeles are some of the most notable places affected. Both of these places experience high levels of poverty and are mostly filled with black and Latino residents. As a result, these neighborhoods are also filled with high amounts of water and air pollution (*"The Unequal Burden of Datacenters"*). Datacenter companies know that these neighborhoods are already environmentally stressed, and deliberately chose to add in an environmentally toxic site. Closer to home, there has been another debacle about data centers involving a township in Michigan. Saline Township, a small Michigan town, has had trouble getting rid of an uninvited guest. OpenAI and Oracle

teamed up to build a data center in this town, and residents aren't happy about it. Residents vetoed the approval to start construction on the data center, but the developer ended up suing shortly after. Saline Township had no choice but to settle due to not having enough money to drag out a court battle. Not long after, Oracle started rolling out the construction, and now their data center is set to open soon. Saline Township tried all they could; they protested and tried to stop them, but the laws were too constricting for them to do anything about it (Goldman). This is just one example of hundreds of other cities like Saline Township where the government cared more about the growth of AI rather than the safety and well-being of their citizens.

Now that you're familiar with AI databases, what they are, and how they can harm people, we can talk about what this means for Fort Wayne. Everything that was mentioned previously — overconsumption of water and electricity, noise pollution, environmental harm — will happen to Fort Wayne as well. We can already see some of these trends starting with our two AI data centers that we have. Small community petitions and protests have already begun in neighborhoods near the data centers. The residents have been speaking out over concerns regarding the energy usage and air pollution. The biggest AI data center in Fort Wayne is owned by Google. This two-billion-dollar data center has already started on the wrong foot by having to build on part of the protected wetlands. To Google's credit, they are paying to have the portion they damaged fixed, but that doesn't negate the space they now take up in a protected habitat. Them paying for repairs also doesn't address the fact that they will be actively harming that ecosystem for as long as they are operating there. These data centers will pollute the ecosystem with noise, greenhouse gases, and toxic chemicals. Google decided to build its data center near a high school, meaning that all of that excess pollution will be affecting them too. Another issue is with the trend of disparate treatment towards minorities and impoverished people. It's been an established trend of companies putting their data centers in minority, impoverished, and water-scarce areas. This can be observed already in Fort Wayne as well. The other, smaller data center in Fort Wayne has clear evidence of this happening. The data center is located on South Anthony Blvd, on the Southeast side of Fort Wayne. This side of Fort Wayne is known for being the most diverse section of the city. The area has

more minorities living there than there are white people, and they also have an overall lower income rate than the rest of Fort Wayne. The data center is also located across the street from several residential neighborhoods and an RV park (*point2homes*). This means that all of the pollution from this data center will be spreading and affecting the residents instead of just the wildlife. Both data centers are so new, yet they can be seen with this many issues and complaints already. Another complaint is about how people's property value is going down from living near the data center. Even if the residents could leave, which most can't because of poverty, they aren't able to sell their home due to the pollution and a constant, humming noise. This is a targeted and unfair disadvantage to any neighborhood living around the data center, while the city gets to gloat about what goods the data center brings in for Fort Wayne.

When talking about the dangerous effects of AI datacenters, many people like to compare, saying that datacenters aren't our biggest ecological problem right now. While it might not be the biggest issue, when it comes to your backdoor, you can't ignore it anymore. Datacenters are growing at a rapid pace, and soon everybody will be faced with the consequences of not acting sooner. As with most ecological concerns, there are ways to help mitigate this issue. You can sign petitions and call up local lawmakers when they are introducing a potential new development. It's also helpful to attend city council meetings where they can hear feedback straight from the public. Of course, one of the best things to do is to spread awareness; make everyone aware of this issue and why it needs to be fixed. Data centers are quickly progressing to be the fastest-growing polluters in the US. We don't need AI at the cost of our natural resources being depleted. Remember that data centers aren't environmentally sustainable; until they can find a way to not harm anyone or the environment, they don't need to be implemented.

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