Data Centers: Monster Moves

By Lynne M Taylor

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Author's Note: It's not new news that Data Centers are becoming quite an issue, all across America. These massive centers are also an issue, across the world. With the continued push for economic gains BEFORE people's wellbeing, we're going to see even more of these centers built. My previous article[1] sought to point out some of the most 'not so much talked about' dangers. This article will go into deeper detail and share new information. —LMT

Monster Move #1:

Water control

If you live in an area where the water is controlled by a government or a government approved private entity, the control you have is limited. If you live where your water comes from a well, you know that water can become scarce in a drought, which limits you as well. In more recent years, we've seen water bans in communities of all sizes due to droughts. So, what are we in for, when a data center takes the water away from citizens? Texas has seen this happen in real time.[2]

Millions of gallons of water consumed by a non-living thing. Think about it, most of that water is gone forever. Then, citizens are asked to further sacrifice their usage. How is this not a monster move?!

Look in your country, city, state or district to see what group is controlling water. For example, the county of North Carolina I live in has a 'water corporation[3]. Within its plan that was 'set in stone' in 2020, all kinds of levels of 'conservation' are in place. If you violate these levels, you could face fines. Are these per day? Week? Month? While the plan does appear to be for droughts, it's not exclusive to droughts, so the question is: What happens if and when a data center causes enforced conservation? Is a citizen/taxpayer expected to pay a fine for something man-made?

Monster Move #2:

Farmland loss

Have you noticed that the majority of data centers are taking up farmland? What about the solar panels that might be used to help 'feed' a data center? Or a nuclear facility that can 'feed' a data center? If you cannot see the connections for how this will impact the crops grown or livestock raised, then I beg you to research the topic. For example, **FarmDocDaily**[4] reported that the difference in the number of acres of farmland (includes pastures) between 1997 and 2022, in the US, was *75 million acres* LESS. Does your state or location have a *farmland preservation program*? If so, what about *buffer zones* surrounding those precious acres? The proposed data center in my town chose a location that is in a buffer zone and will negatively impact the preservation zone. As an example, see the **North Carolina farm preservation program**[5] website (Footnote #5). Texas, is leading the nation in lost farmland due to urbanization and residential booms. North Carolina is 2nd. By 2040, we'll lose 1.2 million acres at the speed we're going.

Nationally? According to **Farmland Partners**[6], across the nation, a whopping 20.1 million acres has been lost (2022) compared to five years prior. Ironically, the same website stated that *"Unless global grain production gets a big bump*

from yield increases, an additional 23 to 24 million acres of farmland will be needed in the next 5 years to meet food demand.."

The question to ask here, is do I want to eat or do I want to ruin farmland with data centers?

Globally? **FoodTank**[7] reported that enough land to make two Germany sized nations has been lost or ruined. "Food sovereignty' is the buzz phrase used on this website. Ironically, the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals** describes this phenomenon as *'food insecurity[8]*. Have you looked at the rankings[9] of *UN member-states* which have adhered to the **SDG #2 (Zero Hunger)**? For example, America's ranking for SDG #2 is lacking (red). Contrast that with a nation like Australia, which is also lacking, but has stagnated, too.

Monster Move #3:

Hype vs fact

If you've heard a data center representative speak about how great it will be for the local economy, schools, etc., then you know the city leaders have also been given the same sales pitch. It's swoony worthy talk for sure. Trouble is that pretty soon, those leaders are spreading the same kind of talk. Here's one hype point vs fact:

> Millions of dollars that can go to all sorts of community needs. However, at what cost to humans? Wildlife? Natural resources? Across the nation and world, folks are seeing first hand the actual facts/costs and it's downright criminal! Healthcare costs? Are you kidding me, not much is said about that.

> For example, where I live, the proposed data center sales pitch states more money for local schools. Let's say that might be $5.00, of that, less than ½ a cent actually makes it into the school. Where did the rest go? Administration

costs or county/city funds. To further extend my example, the manmade lake in my town has already been 'flagged' as a hot spot for cancers.

Yet, little to nothing has been stated in the sales pitches that shares what health care concerns and costs will be when data center related health care issues arise.

In 2024, the **Washington (state) Dept. of Ecology**[10] released information about air quality. It revealed that diesel exhaust is an issue. Nitrous oxide was also found to be an issue. Both of these chemicals/gases are known for lung and heart diseases.

Related to this information is a study published by Han, Wu, Li, Wierman, and Ren (Dec. 2024) that detailed the costs associated with data center health care damages. According to their research, data centers will increase asthma cases by 600,000. At least 1,300 will result in premature death. Public health care costs, by 2030, are expected to exceed $20 billion!

In 2018, **NC NewsLine** reported that Lake Norman, NC (that man-made lake I mentioned above), that an increase in our youth, for thyroid cancer[11] caused a study to be conducted by the **NC Dept. of Health and Human Services**. As of 2020[12], a study was still in the design phase.

Let's go back to the Han, Wu, Li, Wierman and Ren study[13] for a moment. The state of Virginia has the most data centers in the entire USA. See what the study shared about the air pollution and diseases possible in that state. However, look at the other states which will also be involved.
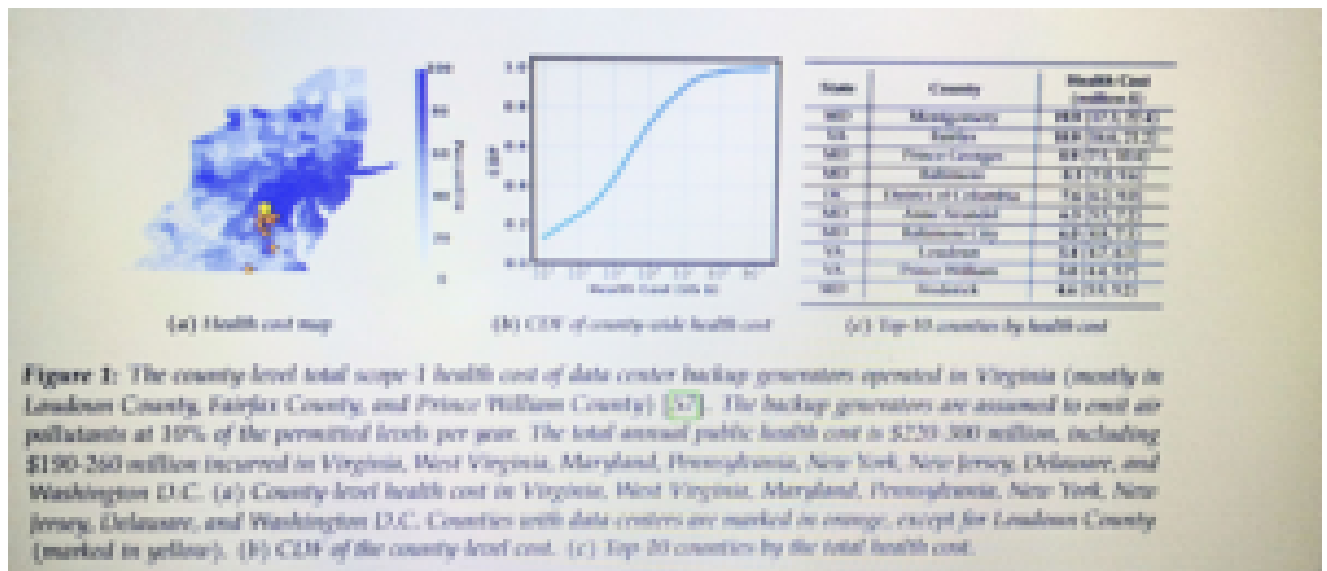
Figure 1: The county level total scope-1 health cost of data center backup generators operated in Virginia (mostly in Loudoun County, Fairfax County, and Prince William County) [ ]. The backup generators are assumed to emit air pollutants at 10% of the permitted levels per year. The total annual public health cost is $220-300 million, including $190-260 million incurred in Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Washington D.C. (a) County-level health cost in Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Washington D.C. Counties with data centers are marked in orange, except for Loudoun County (marked in yellow). (b) CDF of the county level cost. (c) Top 20 counties by the total health cost.

(Total annual public health care costs of $220-300 million. Included in that is at least $190 million for West VA, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Washington, D.C.!)

Here's another question, since the study is only as old as 2023, what long-term costs to our health will there be?

What else can impact our health? Landfills! Data centers have what's called 'e-waste'. While some of the hype is that e-waste can be recycled, it's also true that landfills will also see an increase in old hardware (and who knows what other waste) from data centers. Each piece of hardware is supposed to last about 5 years. The **Univ. of CA, San Francisco** has reported[14] the following, *"E-waste does not belong in the landfill, recycling, or compost. When e-waste is disposed of improperly and ends up in a landfill, it releases toxic chemicals that are harmful to both human health and the environment. The toxins released have been found to cause cancer, neurological damages, and miscarriages. E-waste has environmental justice impacts as well. Marginalized communities that live next to landfills are disproportionally affected by the toxins that e-waste leaks into the surrounding environment."*

The **U.S.'s Environmental Protection Agency** has reported that a partnership with the **United Nations** will address e-waste

disposal[15]. Currently, America's e-waste is shipped to other countries. In some of these countries, people are becoming burdened with healthcare issues caused by the toxic chemicals released. Should the e-waste stay in America, what other healthcare diseases will 'pop up'? It's worth noting that the EPA partnership information is somewhat dated, so you'll need to check your area for updates.

Other hype vs facts questions you should consider:

What tax incentives for corporations which either build data centers or use them? Are the tax incentives local, state, regional or federal? Are the tax breaks combined like coupons at a grocery store?

What tax breaks will local communities give citizens for enforced participation?

What about land value losses or property losses?

Will my local property tax increase?

What happens when either the city or corporation uses eminent domain or other measures to take my home and land? (A town[16] in Oregon has had this happen[17])

What legislation is being drafted to help create more data centers? Check local ordinances, zoning requests, state or regional legislation and finally see what is happening at a federal level.

For example, the **Trump 2.0 Administration** has used an *Executive Order[18]* to increase, nationally, data centers. The **U.S. Dept. of Education**[19] has also issued a *"Dear Colleague"* letter embedding more AI (artificial intelligence) in our schools. Which can lead to over exposure to screens. If you don't live in America, what is your nation or area doing?

Finally, at what cost to our freedoms, liberties will you say

'enough'?

At what cost to our future generations or our existing planet will you stand up against this rising tide of control? While many of the data centers target low-income locations, what happens when the centers start appearing in middle-class areas? What about the local economy where small businesses are concerned? The data centers need HVAC services, specialized medical care, etc.? Data center services like these will go to major corporations[20], not local mom and pop businesses. What, if any, trade policies will need to be created between governments and private entities?

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Footnotes:

1. https://americanpolicy.org/2025/07/18/data-centers-growing-dangers/
2. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/us/texas-ai-data-centers-water-usage-texas-ai-centers-guzzle-463-million-gallons-now-residents-are-asked-to-cut-back-on-showers-ai-news/articleshow/122983253.cms?from=mdr
3. https://iredellwater.com/drought-contingency (scroll down for the pdf)
4. https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2024/09/loss-of-us-farmland-in-the-21st-century-the-national-perspective-from-the-census-of-agriculture.html
5. https://www.ncagr.gov/adfp
6. https://www.farmlandpartners.com/looming-challenge-feeding-the-world-amidst-farmland-scarcity/
7. https://foodtank.com/news/2024/06/new-report-notes-the-global-struggle-over-farmland-and-food-sovereignty/
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9. https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings

10. https://ecology.wa.gov/air-climate/air-quality/data-centers

11. https://ncnewsline.com/briefs/breaking-dhhs-investigating-suspected-cancer-cluster-near-lake-norman/

12. https://www.iredellcountync.gov/1255/Thyroid-Cancer-Information

13. https://www.caltech.edu/about/news/air-pollution-and-the-public-health-costs-of-ai

14. https://campuslifeserviceshome.ucsf.edu/sustainability/news/truth-about-e-waste

15. https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/cleaning-electronic-waste-e-waste

16. https://hillsboroherald.com/oregons-governor-kotek-pulls-back-the-pen-cancelling-massive-tech-expansion-hopes/

17. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3NeM0SELVA

18. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/accelerating-federal-permitting-of-data-center-infrastructure/

19. https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-issues-guidance-artificial-intelligence-use-schools-proposes-additional-supplemental-priority

20. https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/lennox-expands-into-data-center-cooling/