DATA CENTER

Myth-Busting Reference Guide

Evidence-Based Responses to Common Misconceptions & Disinformation

KANSAS COMMERCE

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Each section addresses a specific myth or misconception about data centers. The structure is consistent:

- THE MYTH — The claim heard in the community, often stated verbatim
- THE FACTS — Ground-level, verifiable truth with source citations
- NUANCE / CAUTION (where applicable) — Areas where partial truth exists and honest qualification is needed
- BOTTOM LINE — A plain-language summary for direct communication

Color coding:

- "**MYTH**" labels appear in red — the claim being contested
- "**FACT**" labels appear in green — confirmed, citable truth
- "**CAUTION**" labels appear in amber — areas requiring nuanced handling

MYTH #1 "A data center will drain all the water in our community."

THE MYTH

Data centers consume enormous, uncontrollable quantities of water and will deplete local water supplies, dry up rivers, and leave residents without drinking water.

THE FACTS

Water use in data centers is highly technology-dependent. There are fundamentally three classes of cooling:

- **Air-cooled (dry cooling):** Uses zero water for cooling. A facility using only air cooling has a Water Usage Effectiveness (WUE) of 0. This is the industry's gold standard in water-stressed areas.
- **Closed-loop liquid cooling:** Water circulates internally in a sealed system. Once filled at construction, can reduce freshwater consumption by up to 70%. These systems are now the standard for new high-density AI facilities.
- **Evaporative cooling towers:** The most water-intensive method, used historically because it is energy-efficient and cheaper. A 100 MW hyperscale data center using evaporative cooling can consume roughly 530,000 gallons per day.

  Source: International Energy Agency (IEA), cited in Network World, Feb. 2026; EESI (Environmental and Energy Study Institute), 2025

The industry is actively transitioning away from evaporative cooling in water-stressed regions. Major examples include:

- **Microsoft:** Beginning August 2024, all new Microsoft data center designs use zero-water evaporation closed-loop chip-level cooling, avoiding over 125 million liters of water per year per facility. Pilot sites in Phoenix, AZ and Mt. Pleasant, WI are operational.

  Source: Microsoft Cloud Blog, December 2024
- **Equinix:** Formally committed in 2023 to avoid evaporative cooling in all high water-stress areas.

  Source: Equinix Blog, September 2024
- **Google:** Committed to replenish more water than it consumes by 2030. Its Pflugerville, TX facility (air-cooled) used only about 10,000 gallons in all of 2024 — roughly two months of a single household's use.

  Source: The Invading Sea, September 2025; Google Sustainability Reports

MYTH 1 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MYTH #1 "A data center will drain all the water in our community."

WUE (Water Usage Effectiveness) is the industry's standard measurement metric, developed by The Green Grid. The industry average WUE is 1.9 liters per kWh consumed, but this number varies dramatically by technology choice and climate. Regulators and developers are expected to negotiate and disclose WUE targets.

Source: EESI, 2025; Equinix WUE Analysis, November 2024

CAUTION — PARTIAL TRUTH

Older-design, evaporative-cooled data centers in water-scarce regions do pose real water depletion risks. Not all developers default to sustainable choices without contractual requirements. Communities should negotiate WUE commitments and cooling technology requirements as part of development agreements, not assume best practices will be followed automatically.

BOTTOM LINE

The "data center will drain our water" claim assumes 1970s technology. Modern engineering choices — and contractual requirements communities should demand — can reduce on-site water consumption to near zero. Water concerns are real for poorly designed or poorly sited facilities. They are addressable by engineering design, not inevitable.

MYTH #2 "Residents will pay higher utility bills to subsidize the data center."

THE MYTH

A data center will cause our electric bills to skyrocket as utilities pass infrastructure costs to residential customers to serve this massive industrial power user.

THE FACTS - KANSAS LAW SPECIFICALLY PROTECTS TAXPAYERS

In Kansas, the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) unanimously approved new large-load tariff rules in November 2025 that directly address this concern:

- Large-load users (data centers drawing 75 MW or more) must sign energy contracts of 12 to 17 years.
- Large-load users must pay a minimum of 80% of their contracted demand even in months they use less, protecting other ratepayers from stranded costs.
- Large-load users must post collateral equal to two years of minimum bills — meaning the financial risk of non-payment sits with the data center, not residents.
- Large-load users must pay for any transmission upgrades required to serve their facilities. The KCC estimates these customers will pay 7–10% more than existing industrial customers, on a $200M+ annual power bill, shifting costs that would otherwise fall on the general rate base.

Source:Kansas Corporation Commission Order, November 6, 2025; Utility Dive, November 10, 2025; Kansas Reflector, November 6, 2025

Additionally, Kansas SB 98 (enacted 2025) explicitly prohibits public utilities from granting data centers the standard 40%/20% economic development discounted rate that other large industrial customers can access. Data centers in Kansas are barred by law from receiving this incentive.

Source: Kansas SB 98; Ankura Analysis, 2025; Lexology Analysis, 2025

CAUTION - IMPORTANT NUANCE

The above protections are real and specific to Kansas — but they do not tell the whole story. There is a documented national pattern of concern:

- In Virginia, Dominion Energy proposed its first base-rate increase since 1992 in February 2025, adding ~$8.51/month for a typical household. Data center infrastructure buildout was among the contributing drivers.

MYTH 2 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MYTH #2 "Residents will pay higher utility bills to subsidize the data center."

- In Georgia, electricity costs have surged in recent years, partly due to the rapid expansion of data centers.
- The key legal distinction: Kansas law prohibits direct subsidization of data center electricity costs. But utilities can still seek rate increases to recover infrastructure investments (new power lines, transformers, substations) that serve growing load — including data centers — if a regulator approves such recovery.

Source: Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, February 2026; Time, February 2026; NPR, February 2026

BOTTOM LINE

In Kansas, residents are legally shielded from directly subsidizing data center power usage. The data center must finance its own infrastructure and pay market-rate or above-market rates. However, community members are right to watch utility rate cases involving infrastructure expansion, and regulators should require proportional cost recovery from large load customers rather than spreading costs across the residential base.

MYTH #3 "Data centers are deafening. The noise will destroy our quality of life."

THE MYTH

Data centers operate like an industrial factory running 24/7 at extreme noise levels.

THE FACTS - NOISE IS A REAL CONCERN, NOT A MANUFACTURED ONE

Data centers do contain mechanical equipment that produces sound, primarily from cooling systems and backup generators. Typical ranges include:

- **Interior server halls:** 70–95 dB (similar to other industrial mechanical spaces; hearing protection is typically used by staff).
- **Exterior cooling equipment:** generally 55–75 dBA at the source depending on system design.
- **Backup generators:** can reach 85–100 dBA when operating, but these typically run only during periodic testing or power outages.
- For comparison:

  60 - 65 dB – Normal conversation

  70 dB – Dishwasher or busy office

  80 - 90 dB – Lawn mower

Because buildings, distance, and acoustic design reduce sound levels, noise at the property line is typically much lower and subject to local noise ordinances

Source: TechTarget, 2024; C&C Technology Group, 2024; Gerry McGovern, Data Centers Are Noisy as Hell

Community noise regulations typically set limits of 50–60 dBA. However, most of these ordinances were written before constant, 24/7 low-frequency industrial noise was a common community issue.

Source: Larson Davis Noise Monitoring Systems, 2025

REGULATORY SOLUTIONS IN USE

- **Fairfax County, VA:** Requires 200-foot setbacks from residential areas, pre- and post-construction noise studies, and mandatory acoustic barriers for all external equipment.

MYTH 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MYTH #3 "Data centers are deafening. The noise will destroy our quality of life."

- Liquid and immersion cooling dramatically reduce external fan noise by eliminating or reducing the need for large air-cooled HVAC equipment.
- Acoustic sound walls of 30+ feet can achieve 11 dBA reduction at residences.
- Real-time noise monitoring with automated alerts is now standard engineering practice.

Source: Ramboll Engineering, December 2024; Noise Monitoring Services, 2025; Fairfax County Government

BOTTOM LINE

Data centers do generate mechanical noise, primarily from cooling systems and backup generators. However, modern facility design, local zoning requirements, and engineering controls are commonly used to manage noise levels and maintain compliance with community standards. Noise impacts are therefore site-specific and typically addressed through local planning and permitting processes.

MYTH #4 "They're buying up all the land – there will be no buffer zones and they're building massive complexes."

THE MYTH

Data center developers are purchasing large land tracts with no concern for buffer zones, building unlimited-scale mega-complexes with no regard for neighboring properties.

THE FACTS

Modern hyperscale AI data centers do require substantial land. This is a factual reality:

- A large hyperscale campus can cover hundreds of acres of impermeable surface. The Talen Energy project proposed in Montour County, PA sought to rezone approximately 1,300 acres.
- Prince William County, VA saw data centers account for 74% of the county's $3.1 billion in commercial growth in tax year 2023, leading county supervisors to halt several projects in October 2024.

Source: Reuters, December 2025; Data Center Knowledge, 2024; Dgtl Infra, 2024

However, buffer zones are not optional in responsible development — they are standard engineering practice and increasingly required by ordinance

- Noise, light, and visual impact standards require setbacks from residential and agricultural zones in virtually all jurisdictions with active data center development.
- Developer-driven best practices include vegetative screening, berm construction, and strategic facility orientation to shield neighboring uses.

The legitimate concern here is at the zoning and land-use planning level, not data center engineering per se. Communities that lack specific data center zoning ordinances are more vulnerable to dense siting without adequate buffers. The solution is proactive land-use policy, not a blanket opposition.

BOTTOM LINE

Large hyperscale facilities do require large parcels. Buffer zones must be actively required by local ordinance — they do not happen automatically. Communities should adopt or update zoning ordinances specifically addressing data center setbacks, building heights, screening requirements, and campus density limits before a proposal arrives, not after.

MYTH #5 "If we allow one, we will be overrun with data centers."

THE MYTH

Approving one data center is a one-way door — the community will be unable to stop a flood of similar facilities, losing control of development permanently.

THE FACTS

The clustering effect in data centers is real but not inevitable, and is controllable through local policy:

- Data centers do cluster because they need fiber connectivity, high-voltage transmission infrastructure, and proximity to existing facilities for sub-millisecond latency. Once these infrastructure investments are made, the area becomes more attractive to subsequent developers.
- Northern Virginia's "data center alley" — the world's densest concentration — grew from one facility to 43 million square feet of permitted space in Loudoun County alone, a 231% increase between 2018 and 2024.

  Source: LandApp, Northern Virginia Case Study, January 2025
- Role of Local Policy:

Even in areas with strong infrastructure advantages, local governments retain authority over land use decisions. Communities typically manage development through:

  - zoning designations
  - conditional use permits
  - site plan review
  - building height and setback standards
  - infrastructure and utility agreements

Several jurisdictions around the country have adopted additional policies such as acreage limits, spacing requirements, or designated technology districts to guide development.

BOTTOM LINE

Data centers may cluster in locations with strong power and fiber infrastructure, but communities maintain control over where and how development occurs through local zoning and planning decisions. Development patterns vary significantly based on local policy choices and market conditions.

MYTH #6

"We are being overwhelmed with data center inquiries – they must all be real."

THE MYTH (INVERSE)

Every site inquiry and expression of interest from a data center developer represents a committed, funded project that will definitely be built.

THE FACTS

In practice, large technology and infrastructure companies typically evaluate multiple locations simultaneously before selecting a final site.

How the Site Selection Process Works

During early stages of site selection, companies may:

- Review numerous potential sites across several states
- Use project code names to maintain confidentiality during competitive processes
- Assess power availability, fiber connectivity, land availability, and permitting timelines

As a result, many early inquiries represent preliminary market evaluations rather than finalized projects.

Infrastructure and Timing Considerations

Data center development also depends on several infrastructure factors that can affect whether a project ultimately proceeds, including:

- Availability and timing of electric transmission capacity
- Permitting and environmental review timelines
- Land assembly and site readiness
- Market demand for computing capacity

Because of these factors, it is common for companies to evaluate several locations before committing to a single site.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

Kansas law includes additional review steps for qualifying projects. Under SB 98 (2025), proposed data center projects receiving public incentives must undergo review by the Kansas Intelligence Fusion Center and Kansas Department of Commerce before benefits are awarded.

Source: Kansas SB 98, 2025

BOTTOM LINE

Early-stage site inquiries are a normal part of the site selection process and do not always result in construction. Final project announcements typically occur only after companies have completed detailed infrastructure, permitting, and financial evaluations.

MYTH #7

"Data centers will turn our water into black sludge / severely pollute our water supply."

THE MYTH

Some community discussions suggest that data centers discharge heavily contaminated water or create "toxic sludge" that could harm local waterways.

THE FACTS - EXTREME CLAIMS ARE FALSE

The "black sludge" characterization has no basis in documented evidence. However, water quality impacts from data centers are multifaceted. An honest accounting requires addressing several distinct mechanisms:

1. What the Data Shows

There is no evidence that data centers discharge "black sludge" or untreated industrial waste into drinking water systems.

Like many industrial and commercial facilities that use cooling systems, some data centers circulate water through cooling equipment. In certain designs, a portion of that water is periodically discharged and replaced as part of normal system maintenance.

Depending on the cooling technology used, this discharge water may contain:

- Minerals and dissolved solids concentrated during the cooling process
- Small amounts of treatment chemicals used to control scaling or biological growth
- Elevated temperature relative to incoming water

These characteristics are similar to cooling systems used in many industrial facilities.

Source: KETOS Water Intelligence, July 2024; American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), 2024; Data Center Knowledge, November 2025

2. Regulatory Oversight

Water use and discharge from data centers are regulated through existing environmental and utility frameworks, including:

- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits for any direct discharge to surface waters
- State environmental permitting requirements
- Local wastewater utility standards for discharge into municipal systems

Facilities that discharge to municipal sewer systems may be required to pretreat wastewater before discharge to ensure compliance with local treatment plant requirements.

MYTH 7 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MYTH #7 "Data centers will turn our water into black sludge / severely pollute our water supply."

3. Engineering and Operational Practices

Modern data center designs increasingly incorporate technologies that reduce or eliminate water discharge, including:

- Closed-loop cooling systems
- Direct-to-chip liquid cooling
- Air-cooled systems in water-constrained regions

Where water is used, operators typically conduct engineering analyses to evaluate water use, discharge characteristics, and treatment requirements as part of project permitting.

WHAT REGULATORS REQUIRE (AND WHAT THEY SHOULD

- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits regulate any direct discharge to surface water, including temperature and chemical limits.
- Many utilities now require data centers to pretreat blowdown before discharge to the sewer system.
- On-site treatment systems (DAF, MBR, RO systems) are established engineering solutions for facilities where discharge volumes or contaminant concentrations exceed municipal limits.

BOTTOM LINE

Data centers do not discharge untreated industrial waste into drinking water systems. Water use and wastewater discharge are subject to established environmental regulations and local utility standards, and impacts are evaluated on a site-specific basis during project permitting and review.

MYTH #8 "Data centers will destroy our electrical grid and cause blackouts."

THE MYTH

The massive power draw of data centers will destabilize the local grid, cause blackouts, and leave existing customers without power.

THE FACTS

The relationship between data centers and grid stability is nuanced — there are both documented risks and documented benefits, depending on how a facility is designed and integrated:

GRID STABILITY BENEFITS

- Data centers operate at a very high, predictable load factor. Dominion Virginia reported an 82% load factor for large data centers in 2024. This predictability is a planning asset for utilities — unlike residential load, which spikes unpredictably, data center load is steady and forecastable.

  Source: Grid Strategies LLC, National Load Growth Report, 2025
- New generation data centers with battery storage integrated into their UPS systems can provide active grid services: frequency regulation, demand response, and voltage support. Startups like Verrus are specifically designing data centers to send power back to the grid during peak demand events.

  Source: NLR / National Lab Research, February 2026
- The DOE's DCFlex project, partnering with Google, Meta, Microsoft, Duke Energy, and PJM (one of the nation's largest grid operators), is demonstrating how data center workloads can be shifted to reduce grid stress during peak hours.

  Source: ITIF (Information Technology and Innovation Foundation), November 2025
- A Duke University / Nicholas Institute study found that data centers and other large flexible loads could integrate 76–126 GW of new national demand without proportionate grid expansion, if they accept curtailment during fewer than 100 hours per year. This is a transformational finding for grid planning.

  Source: ITIF, November 2025; Renewable Energy World, December 2025

MYTH 8 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MYTH #8 "Data centers will destroy our electrical grid and cause blackouts."

REAL GRID RISK: SIMULTANEOUS DISCONNECTION

In July 2024, a voltage fluctuation in Northern Virginia caused 60 data centers to disconnect from the grid simultaneously, creating a 1,500 MW surplus that required emergency adjustments to prevent a cascading outage. This is a documented real risk when many large facilities are concentrated in a single area and use traditional UPS systems that automatically disconnect rather than ride through disturbances.

Source: Schneider Electric Blog, February 2026

Transmission System Operators are now requiring "Fault Ride-Through" (FRT) capability for large data center loads, meaning facilities must maintain connection and support the grid through short-duration disturbances rather than dropping load suddenly.

Infrastructure Investment

Data center development drives substantial utility infrastructure investment that benefits all customers in the long run: new substations, upgraded transmission lines, expanded generation capacity. These investments improve overall grid resilience and reliability — though they require careful rate design to ensure data center customers shoulder their proportionate share.

Source: Engineering News-Record, December 2025

BOTTOM LINE

Data centers are not inherently grid destroyers. A properly sited, properly integrated data center with battery storage, demand response capability, and Fault Ride-Through compliant UPS systems can actually improve grid stability. The risk scenario — destabilization — arises from concentration of many inflexible, simultaneously-disconnecting facilities in the same area. This is a design, regulation, and siting standard issue, not an inherent property of data centers.

MYTH #9

"A data center won't attract any other businesses or tech development – it's a dead end economically."

THE MYTH

Data centers are isolated, non-interactive industrial buildings with no meaningful broader economic development effect for a community.

THE FACTS

Data centers function as digital infrastructure anchors. When negotiated properly, they catalyze broader tech ecosystem development:

- According to CBRE research, each direct job created in the data center industry generates an average of 7.4 ancillary jobs across the broader local economy, including construction, operations, maintenance, cybersecurity, telecommunications, and related services.

  Source: WYEDC, citing CBRE Research, 2025
- In southeastern Wisconsin, Microsoft's data centers at Mount Pleasant were accompanied by investments in workforce development, R&D, manufacturing, and tech startup ecosystems — without being formally required in the development agreement.

  Source: Brookings Institution, February 2026
- CoreWeave's data centers in New Jersey were structured as part of the NJ AI Hub with Princeton University, Microsoft, and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, with $20 million committed to emerging startups.

  Source: Brookings Institution, February 2026
- The Brookings Institution's analysis concludes: "Regions should treat data center negotiations not as isolated real estate transactions but as ecosystem-shaping moments that trade infrastructure access for commitments to advance local innovation, talent, and industry strengths."

  Source: Brookings Institution, February 2026

MYTH 9 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MYTH #9

"A data center won't attract any other businesses or tech development – it's a dead end economically."

Cybersecurity and Tech Sector Attraction

Data centers require and attract:

- Cybersecurity operations: Every large data center is a major cybersecurity employer and attracts security firms. National security and intelligence community facilities cluster around high-security data infrastructure.
- Fiber and telecom expansion: Data center development drives fiber buildout that serves entire regions, lowering connectivity costs and enabling other tech-dependent businesses.
- Cloud services firms, edge computing operators, and managed service providers cluster near major data center hubs to offer co-located services.
- Advanced manufacturing: Cooling system manufacturers, UPS manufacturers, generator maintenance, and specialized construction firms establish local operations near major data center markets.

IMPORTANT QUALIFICATION

Data centers themselves are not big direct employers. A typical facility creates 1,000+ construction jobs during the build phase, but only 100–200 permanent operational jobs. The broader economic development benefits are real but require deliberate negotiation — they do not happen automatically.

Source: Wisconsin Public Radio, 2025; Brookings, 2026

BOTTOM LINE

Data centers generally employ fewer permanent staff than many other industries, but they involve substantial capital investment and infrastructure development. Their broader economic effects depend on project size, local infrastructure needs, and how communities integrate them into regional economic development strategies.

MYTH #10 "The tax revenue from a data center isn't worth the trade-offs."

THE MYTH

The tax revenue generated by data centers is negligible, especially given the incentives provided, and does not justify the impacts on communities.

THE FACTS — REVENUE IS SIGNIFICANT WHEN PROPERLY STRUCTURED

Where local tax policy captures the full taxable value — including real property, personal property (servers, racks, cooling equipment), and fixtures — data center tax revenue has been transformational for local governments:

- Loudoun County, VA: The world's largest data center concentration now provides nearly half of all property tax revenue, contributing an estimated $663 million in 2022. The county's fiscal analysis calculates approximately $26 in tax revenue for every $1 in county services the data centers require.
- Prince William County, VA: Data centers generated $166.4 million in local tax revenue in 2023.

Source: LandApp / Olney Enterprise, January/November 2025

Mill levy and property tax assessment dynamics:

- Data centers are highly capital-intensive. Equipment (servers, chillers, UPS systems, switchgear) represents $775M+ of tangible personal property in a typical facility, with servers cycling on a 3-5 year replacement schedule.
- In Virginia, counties can tax this personal property as "machinery and equipment" — the primary driver of the extraordinary local revenue figures.
- A data center that invests $1 billion generates an estimated $58.3 million in first-year sales tax liability at the national average rate (7.52%), plus ongoing annual obligations as equipment is replaced.

Source: Tax Foundation, December 2025

- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts are a common local tool. A municipality designates a geographic area where new tax revenue from increased property values is used to pay off infrastructure bonds — meaning the data center essentially finances its own serving infrastructure over time.

Source: Wisconsin Public Radio, 2025

MYTH 10 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

MYTH #10 "The tax revenue from a data center isn't worth the trade-offs."

CAUTION — INCENTIVE STRUCTURES CAN DRAMATICALLY REDUCE ACTUAL REVENUE

The revenue figures above reflect jurisdictions where full taxation applies.

- Kansas SB 98 provides a 20-year sales tax exemption for qualified data centers making a minimum $250 million investment and creating at least 20 new jobs. This is the state incentive — but local property tax obligations on real property and equipment, if not separately abated, remain.

  Source: Kansas SB 98, 2025

BOTTOM LINE

The fiscal impact of a data center depends largely on how state and local tax policies are structured and how projects are negotiated at the local level. Communities may evaluate projects based on their capital investment, infrastructure needs, and local tax framework. A data center sited with full sales and personal property taxation can generate tens to hundreds of millions annually.

Key Sources & Citations

All claims in this document are citable. Below are the primary sources by topic area.

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