

Addressing the Health and Environmental Impacts of Data Centers

As the rapid proliferation of data centers continues across the United States, communities, regulatory agencies, and state and local governments are grappling with the impacts. Across Los Angeles County, there are already over 70 established data centers,¹ with the number likely to soon grow as developers approach localities to create additional facilities. As newer hyperscale centers expand in scale and complexity, their energy use and environmental footprint is also increasing, with little community engagement on the potential impacts on residents’ health and wellbeing.

In the absence of critical information, residents from across the County are uplifting their concerns. In the San Gabriel Valley, residents of both incorporated cities and unincorporated areas have voiced their fears and anxieties about the number of data centers under consideration in the region and their associated impacts. Regarding potential development in cities such as Monterey Park, the City of Industry, and El Monte, residents have shared opposition to further development, and in Monterey Park and El Monte, the City Council instituted a moratorium on new development while they

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2025-12-30/southern-california-has-unlikely-ai-mecca-very-industrial-vernon#:~:text=Inside%20a%20three%2Dstory%2C%20242%2C000,industrial%20corner%20of%20L.A.%20County.>

MOTION

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April 14, 2026

Addressing the Health and Environmental Impacts of Data Centers

consider an outright ban on new data centers within city limits altogether. Meanwhile, at community meetings in unincorporated Hacienda Heights and Rowland Heights, residents have expressed worries about the potential development of data centers in the neighboring City of Industry, directly facing unincorporated residential neighborhoods. These meetings have drawn residents from areas beyond the San Gabriel Valley, raising further concerns that these facilities may further proliferate countywide. At these meetings, residents have vocalized the following concerns about data centers: an increase in electrical rates, constant “humming” sound, impact on property values, fire risk, environmental impacts, overuse of water resources, and public health impacts. Residents have also raised concerns about Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), which are distinct from data centers. The Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning is already far along in the development of an ordinance that is informed by community feedback and technical best practices – and the proposed ordinance will define siting and safety standards for BESS in unincorporated LA County.

Studies regarding the impacts of data center facilities are evolving, but several initial reports justify residents’ causes of concern. Studies by the National Resources Defense Council uplift the immense energy usage associated with these facilities, as well as the significant amounts of water needed for cooling equipment. Noise and air pollution concerns have also been uplifted nationwide. In fact, Pacific Gas & Electric reported that the amount of data center energy demand waiting to be connected to the

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April 14, 2026

Addressing the Health and Environmental Impacts of Data Centers

grid is equivalent to more power used than roughly 8 million homes.² A 2026 report by Community & Environmental Defense Services showed pollutants emitted from data centers may adversely impact the health of individuals living as much as .6 miles from the site.

As these facilities spread, state and local governments are working to catch up to provide the regulatory frameworks to address this booming technology. Despite steps that may be taken at the County level to create oversight of data centers, there must also be work done at the state level to create oversight. This is especially pertinent given that due to explicit jurisdictional and legal boundaries, Los Angeles County has no authority to adopt and enforce land use regulations in incorporated cities. Across various levels of government, legislators are currently deliberating zoning and land use, power and water consumption, and associated noise levels.

There are several state bills that have recently been introduced to regulate aspects of data centers. One such bill is SB 978 by Senator Sasha Renée Pérez which would create a separate energy rate class for data centers, recognizing the unique and intense load these facilities have on the electrical grid. It also mandates the use of clean backup generation, requires reporting on data center impacts on meeting the State's climate goals, and ensures any data center construction uses a local workforce. Senator Steve Padilla has also introduced SB 886 and SB 887 to further address concerns. SB

² Source (Little Hoover Commission) PG&E, "PG&E Data Center Demand Pipeline Swells to 10 Gigawatts with Potential to Unlock Billions in Benefits for California" [press release] (Jul. 31, 2025).

Addressing the Health and Environmental Impacts of Data Centers

886 would require the California Public Utilities Commission to establish a special tariff to protect ratepayers from the transmission costs that supply data centers while meeting the state's climate goals. SB 887 would require data centers to follow the process dictated by the California Environmental Quality Act, thus requiring these facilities to complete an environmental impact report, while also allowing data centers to be eligible for Environmental Leadership Development Project certification if they meet requirements of water use, clean energy, and paying full infrastructure costs.

As these discussions continue, a report on how data centers would specifically impact resources and community health in Los Angeles County is critical to help inform future decision-making. Establishing local regulatory oversight of data center placement and operation is needed to ensure community and environmental health and safety is protected. These efforts should also be informed by community feedback. Although there are no data centers currently located in unincorporated Los Angeles County, they continue to expand at a rapid pace with little direct oversight. Industrial cities situated within Los Angeles County are poised to become data center capitals with few residents living in them,³ however, they are often surrounded by communities that have a history of being overburdened by environmental injustices.

It is imperative that communities are appropriately informed on the nature of these advancing technologies, their health and environmental impacts, and the existing

³ <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2025-12-30/southern-california-has-unlikely-ai-mecca-very-industrial-vernon#:~:text=Inside%20a%20three%2Dstory%2C%20242%2C000,industrial%20corner%20of%20L.A.%20County.>

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April 14, 2026

Addressing the Health and Environmental Impacts of Data Centers

state and local regulations that offer the opportunity for oversight and regulation of these facilities. Los Angeles County must also explore all existing authorities ~~within its purview to hold data center developments accountable — both within incorporated and unincorporated communities —~~ safeguard community health and wellbeing, and also advocate for State solutions to address community concerns. As these deliberations are underway, it is reasonable to ~~pause the approval of any potential data center facility permits~~ study the impact of data centers on our local infrastructure and collect thorough feedback from residents to help inform next steps regarding data centers in unincorporated areas of the County until these sites can be managed in a way that protects the health and wellness of residents and the environment, provides appropriate community benefits, and supports construction jobs.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors: ~~1. I~~ 1. instruct Los Angeles County Departments of Public Health and Regional Planning, in consultation with the Departments of Public Works, County Counsel, Internal Services Division, Fire, and the Chief Sustainability Office to provide:

1a. Findings regarding the health, environmental, and safety impacts of data centers on neighboring communities, the impact on electrical and water resources, and a review of how other jurisdictions around the County are regulating data centers within urban areas.

2b. ~~C-A~~ A community education and outreach campaign, that is culturally competent and inclusive of multiple languages, to inform residents on potential

Addressing the Health and Environmental Impacts of Data Centers

impacts of advancing technologies and include the County's current ability to provide oversight of these facilities. This campaign should include subject matter experts attending community meetings, and hosted information sessions that additionally collect community feedback on data centers.

3e. Incorporating community and key stakeholder feedback, including from labor partners, community-based organizations, and subject matter experts, to deliver recommendations on how the County should address the health and land use impacts of data center developments in unincorporated Los Angeles County, including, but not limited to, code amendments and corresponding environmental analysis, and recommend protocols to safeguard the health and wellbeing of impacted residents in surrounding communities.

4. Recommendations for the creation of a robust community benefits infrastructure, incorporating emerging information from other impacted jurisdictions across the country, that include, but are not limited to:

- a. Minimization of utility rate impacts associated with data center energy usage on surrounding communities;
- b. Minimization of water utilization;
- c. Potential requirements for developers to pay for associated costs that impact energy usage, including an associated fee structure, such as environmental health inspection fees, as well as any associated fees utilized for community benefits;

REVISED MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

April 14, 2026

Addressing the Health and Environmental Impacts of Data Centers

- d. Requirements for data centers to utilize clean energy sources to minimize environmental health impacts on residents; and
- e. Requirements for data centers to employ a workforce that is paid a living wage and meet County local hire goals.

5. Report back in writing in 120 days with recommendations on next steps.

~~2. Direct County Counsel to:~~

- ~~a. Explore all available legal actions, that are deemed appropriate to address data center developments in incorporated areas adjacent to County properties and unincorporated areas.~~
- ~~b. Prepare all actions necessary to establish a moratorium ordinance on data center development in unincorporated Los Angeles County that would be initiated as applicable.~~

~~3. Direct the Los Angeles County Departments of Public Health, Regional Planning, Public Works, Internal Services, Fire, the Chief Sustainability Office, and County Counsel to report back in writing in 120 days on Directives 1-3.~~

I, FURTHER, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Chief Executive Office's Office of Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations (CEO-LAIR) to assess the status of statutory and regulatory activities at the California state level to address and protect residents from higher electrical rates, health impacts, and other costs associated with the development of data centers, and advocate in support of SB 978 by Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, and similar legislation.