

BUSINESS INSIDER

DOW JONES ▲ +0.33% NASDAQ ▼ -1.04% S&P 500 ▼ -0.48% AAPL ▲ +0.49% NVDA ▼ -3.21% MSFT ▼ -1.39% AMZN ▼ -2.22% META ▼ -

TECH

Google's water use is soaring. AI is only going to make it worse.

By [Hugh Langley](#)



Jul 24, 2023, 6:41 PM ET

[Share](#) [Save](#)

Google is thirsty.

Its latest environmental report shows a 20% jump in water consumption in its data centers.

As the AI arms race heats up, it may only get worse.

Google just published its 2023 environmental report, and one thing is for certain: The company's water use is soaring.

AD

The internet giant said it consumed 5.6 billion gallons of water in 2022, the equivalent of 37 golf courses. Most of that -- 5.2 billion gallons -- was used for the company's data centers, a 20% increase on the amount Google reported the year prior.

The numbers provide a stark reminder of the environmental cost of running huge data centers, which often require vast amounts of water to stay cool. And as Google and every other tech company in the AI arms race speed to build new data centers, the amount of water they consume will very likely keep rising.

AD

The 20% jump in water consumption is roughly in line with the increase in Google's compute capacity, which has been largely

driven by AI, said Shaolei Ren, an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of California, Riverside.

However, Ren said he's skeptical that this increase is sustainable in the long term, even with Google's commitment to replenish water to offset its usage. "It just makes their water accounting looks nicer, but the water is still consumed," he told Insider.

Google said it has targeted 2030 as a deadline to replenish 120% of the freshwater it consumes across its offices and data centers. Right now it's replenishing just 6%, according to its own report.

AD

The majority of the water Google is consuming right now is "potable," clean enough to be used as drinking water.

In its latest report, Google said it takes "local water stress" (another way of saying scarcity) into account, and said 82% of its freshwater withdrawals in 2022 came from regions with low water stress.

For the remaining 18%, it says it's "exploring new partnerships and opportunities" to improve watershed health, but it may face increased resistance as more places face water shortages.

AD

In 2019, Google planned a data center in Mesa, Arizona that got a guarantee of up to 4 million gallons of water a day. But as Insider's Alistair Barr recently pointed out, Arizona is already facing a water shortage that could put the brakes on some of these types of deals.

Indeed, a Google spokesperson told Insider that, once completed, the Mesa data center will now make use of "air-cooled technology" instead.

Google isn't the only one that's thirsty. Meta, which is also building a data center in Arizona, used more than 2.6 million cubic meters (about 697 million gallons) of water in 2022, mostly for data centers. Its latest large language model, Llama 2, took a lot of water to train.

[Google](#) [Alphabet](#) [Environment](#) [More +](#)

Read next

Big Tech is striking secret deals to make you foot its electricity bill, Harvard researchers say



Meta's CTO breaks down who in Big Tech he thinks has an advantage in the AI race (and it's not Google)



Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang joked about something that could cost his biggest customers billions of dollars



Here's What a New Roof Should Cost You in Alexandria

Enter your ZIP code on this website and share a couple of details about the current state of your roof.

HomeBuddy | Sponsored