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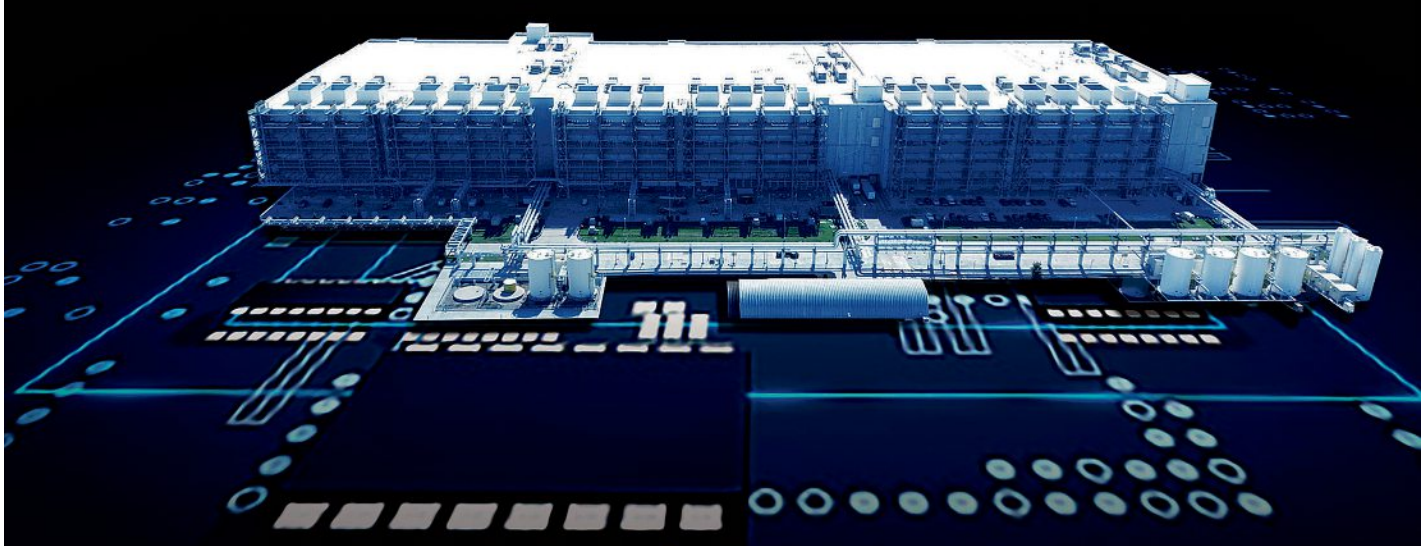
DATA CENTERS: BENEFITS & BURDENS

PROCESSING THE IMPACT



20 years in, how data centers changed one town's economy



Byron McCauley
Columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Iowa –

When the folks from Big Data eye your town for a hyperscale data center, read their lips when they start talking impact, numbers and benefits.

• Nearly two decades ago, Council Bluffs made a starter deal with Google: tax advantages in exchange for economic investment in the form of 200 permanent, good-paying jobs and millions in tax revenue. In 2007, Google announced an initial $600 million hyperscale data center on the site of the city's only remaining drive-in movie theater that had operated since 1950. The original building was 100,000 square feet when it opened. **See DATA CENTERS, Page 7A**

More online

Scan the QR code for the full three-part series, videos, photos, polls, previous coverage and more about the impact of data centers on local communities.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY REESE STRICKLAND, GRAPHIC BY GETTYIMAGES AND ROBIN FERGUSON

Sex trafficking hidden in plain sight

Isabel Hughes
Delaware News Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

WILMINGTON, DE – One by one, the women emerged from Crystal Spa, north of Wilmington, and into public view. Each tried to shield her body as police escorted her out the front door.

This wasn't how the women typically exited the massage business – if they left at all.

For weeks, they had lived behind the lobby's drawn blinds, hidden in windowless back rooms connected by a dim hallway. One room held a single mattress atop a particle-board platform. Three pillows, one for each woman, rested against the wall. Another room served as a kitchen. A third was a shower area, where a plastic storage bin held the faucet.

The remaining rooms were for massages. And for sex.

From 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., seven days a week, the women waited for the next man to walk in. The business averaged eight to 15 buyers per day, they told investigators. Sometimes, police surveillance showed, the men arrived as soon as the doors opened.

Days off were rare, sick days nonexistent. But on a hot Wednesday morning in mid-July, this usual schedule

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Advocacy groups push back on coal ash program

Karl Schneider
Indianapolis Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

Hoosiers have been voicing concerns about a plan to have Indiana take over a federal coal ash program in a move that state officials say will provide consistent oversight of waste from coal-burning power plants.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Sept. 15 proposed approving the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's application for a state-run permitting program. At first, pushback was minimal but as the potential handover has drawn closer, more people are speaking out against the switch.

At a November 12 public hearing, representatives from environmental advocacy groups said the program would have negative effects on Hoosier health and Indiana's water.

Coal combustion residuals, commonly called coal ash or CCR, contain pollutants such as arsenic, chromium, lead, mercury and other heavy metals linked to cancer, heart disease and reproductive failure. These hazardous substances can contaminate groundwater and blow around in the air as dust if utilities do not properly dispose of them.

Indiana has been working since 2021 to create the framework for its own coal ash permitting program and finalized its application in June 2026. The program, if the EPA grants final approval, will house 13 new IDEM employees and will be funded through the permits it issues. The EPA is expected to make a decision by March 2027.

Hoosiers concerned over Indiana coal ash program

Environmental advocacy groups in Indiana spoke at the hearing, saying they opposed the state taking over the federal coal ash program as Indiana regulations are less protective of public health and the environment than federal rules.

A joint statement from groups such as the Hoosier Environmental Council, Just Transition Northwest Indiana, Earthjustice and others says Indiana's current regulations exempt certain coal ash sites from permitting requirements and would allow "dangerous uses of coal ash that federal rules restrict."

During the November hearing, Earthjustice senior attorney Lauren Piette testified against Indiana taking over EPA's coal ash program.

"Indiana's coal ash permit program plainly fails to meet the legal test that Congress set for delegating authority to states," Piette said. "Indiana's program is not as protective as federal requirements. The EPA must deny Indiana's application."

Just Transition Northwest Indiana Executive Director Ashley Williams said IDEM is too under-resourced and under-staffed to properly maintain a new permitting program.

"Too many loopholes and too many questions remain for this program to be

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