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Press release

New report sheds light on commercial data centres' water usage in England

- Survey finds most commercial data centres use minimal water

[London, UK] 18 August 2025 – Amid growing public and political interest in the water usage of data centres, techUK has today published new insight into how commercial data centres in England use water. The report, *Understanding Data Centre Water Use in England*, is based on a survey run in collaboration with the Environment Agency. The results reveal that most surveyed data centres are low water users:

- 51% of surveyed data centres use waterless cooling systems.
- 64% use less than 10,000 m³ of water per year - less than a typical leisure centre and similar to a Premier League Football Club.
- 89% of operators measure water use or do not need to, thanks to closed-loop systems.
- Only 4% of sites reported using over 100,000m³ per year — in line with industrial manufacturing requirements.

Data centres are essential to the UK's digital economy and AI ambitions, powering everything from financial transactions and emergency response to cloud services and advanced computing. With the UK government aiming to expand sovereign compute capacity 20-fold by 2030, these findings suggest that commercial data centres are, in many cases, actively minimising water use through smart design and cooling choices to minimise their environmental impact, particularly in areas with water stress or power constraints.

However, the report goes further, highlighting major data and planning gaps, and calling for urgent collaboration between government, regulators, and the data centre industry to ensure sustainable digital infrastructure growth.

Matthew Evans, Director of Markets and COO, techUK said:

"Data centres are the backbone of the UK's digital economy and will be central to delivering our AI and innovation ambitions. This report shows that, contrary to some public perceptions, most commercial data centres are actively innovating to use minimal water.

"But as demand for compute grows, we must plan ahead. We need smart policies, resilient infrastructure, and stronger data to ensure digital and environmental resilience go hand in hand."

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Richard Thompson, the Environment Agency's Deputy Director for Water Resources, said:

"I am encouraged by the work techUK have undertaken to better understand water usage - the findings suggest UK data centres are utilising a range of cooling technologies and becoming more water conscious.

"Advancements in technology must go hand-in-hand with protecting public water supplies, food security and the environment. It is vital the sector puts sustainability at its heart, and minimises water use in line with evolving standards.

"We are working with industry and other regulators to raise these to secure the best outcomes for our environment and our water supply for future generations."

techUK recommendations

techUK makes several key recommendations to ensure data centre growth is aligned with long-term water sustainability:

For Government

- Build new reservoirs and invest in modern water infrastructure; while the government has taken decisive action to fast-tracking the delivery of nine new reservoirs, none have been delivered in over 30 years.
- Develop a UK-wide Water Exploitation Index for each major river basin to map local water stress, aiding developers and planners.
- Create a digital-first water strategy, embedding smart monitoring and leak prevention.

For Industry

- Measure and report water usage and Water Usage Effectiveness (WUE) across all facilities.
- Adopt advanced cooling technologies and design cooling systems based on local water availability.
- Join the Climate Neutral Data Centre Pact, committing to water efficiency targets.

For Both

- Begin to develop standardised AI chip cooling requirements to reduce energy and water demands at scale.
- Establish a public-private partnership to coordinate infrastructure upgrades and investment.
- Ensure early coordination between developers, water companies, and local authorities, just as is done for electricity.

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About the 'Understanding Data Centre Water Use in England' report

Despite its revealing insights, techUK is clear that the report is not a definitive snapshot of the entire UK data centre ecosystem.

- The survey is one of the first attempts to measure data centres water usage in England. Submissions were anonymous and voluntary. Further investigation and greater sampling will help to provide a bigger, nation-wide picture in the future.
- The survey covered 73 sites, focusing on commercial colocation facilities, which represent a subset of the sector.
- On-premise and enterprise data centres are not included.

However, it offers a valuable starting point for dialogue, regulation, and strategic investment.

With pressure mounting from both climate change and the UK's AI growth ambitions, techUK concludes that collaboration between industry, government and regulators is essential to ensure digital growth does not come at the expense of natural resources.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

The full report can be downloaded here.

About techUK

techUK is the technology trade association that brings together people, companies and organisations to realise the positive outcomes of what digital technology can achieve.

With over 1,100 members (the majority of which are SMEs) across the UK, techUK creates a network for innovation and collaboration across business, government and stakeholders to provide a better future for people, society, the economy and the planet.

By providing expertise and insight, we support members, partners and stakeholders as they prepare the UK for what comes next in a constantly changing world.