OpenAI pitches data center power plants as a way to protect nearby areas



In an announcement on Monday, OpenAI says it will pilot its “Grid Protectors Program” at an upcoming data center in Effingham County, Georgia, where the company promises to free up to 1,000 megawatts of power during extreme weather or emergencies, enough to power air conditioners in around 700,000 homes.

The announcement comes as opposition to data centers spreads across the US, in response to massive projects that have begun development and construction, frequently with little or no input from local residents. In Utah, residents protested after Box Elder County commissioners signed off on a data center expected to consume more than double the state’s peak electricity demand in 2025, and spread hot air in the desert

valley surrounding the data center.

Now OpenAI’s approach is to pitch the construction of power plants that feed the electricity required by the new AI data centers it’s building as “a resource that utilities can call on when communities need it most.”

Several states like Tennessee, Florida, Oklahoma, Oregon, and others have enacted laws that say they will prevent AI companies from passing energy costs on to residents, in addition to moratoriums and other restrictions. This is besides the environmental impacts, as a recent study by the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) said that powering proposed Texas data center projects could undo decades of air quality gains over just five years.

“Electricity demand also rises and falls with the seasons, with different regions facing their biggest peaks at different times,” OpenAI’s announcement says. “Our compute campuses need power year-round. With the right agreements, that steady demand can help spread the grid’s fixed costs across more electricity sales, while flexibility lets us reduce demand when the system is busiest.”

OpenAI says it’s going to continue working with policymakers and utility services to make “arrangements for our future campus to reduce electricity demand when the grid is under strain.” Along with its data center in Georgia, OpenAI is also partnering with Oracle and SoftBank to build its “Stargate” data centers across the US, including in Shackelford County, Texas; Doña Ana County, New Mexico; and Milam County, Texas.

https://www.theverge.com/ai-artificial-intelligence/1024604/openai-data-center-grid-protection-program