Aussie gov’t tells volunteers to throw out thousands of functioning test routers

Last week, thousands of SamKnows routers were bricked after a government program ran its course.

In 2020, as part of a program conducted by the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC), the Australian government’s chief competition regulator, thousands of volunteers received routers to help test and report on the typical speed and performance of broadband plans in Australia. (More specifically, the Measuring Broadband Australia (MBA) program targeted fixed-line broadband services provided over the NBN, Australia’s government-owned wholesale open-access broadband network, as well as services delivered over other access networks.)

According to the final report that the ACCC distributed, the routers are whiteboxes that were “supplied by SamKnows” and that “perform tests to measure internet performance using test servers maintained by SamKnows and hosted in Australia.”

Last month, the program concluded, and the ACCC released its final performance report (PDF). Subsequently, the routers used for the program were bricked after June 30.

Ars Technica reviewed a copy of an email that an MBA volunteer received in mid-June informing them that the program would end on June 30, 2026 and further stating:

> ***Service Termination:*** *Your whitebox will be disabled, and your SamKnows One account will be closed.*

The email, signed by “The SamKnows Team (part of Cisco),” noted that after June 30, the devices would stop collecting data and that users’ “measurement and registration data will be deleted in accordance with our retention obligations under our end-user license agreement.”

However, as one MBA volunteer pointed out to Ars via email, the routers are still working, making the decision to disable the devices an avoidable e-waste risk.

When asked by Ars, the ACCC didn’t specify the number of SamKnows routers disabled last month. However, in a report about the MBA program released in December 2020 (PDF), the ACCC said it initially expected to release about 4,000 whiteboxes throughout the program’s duration and had distributed “over 2,600″ by December 2020. The report noted that the ACCC retained an “adequate pool of whiteboxes to allow for the expansion of our reporting to cover, for example, emerging [retail service providers] and new speed tier plans.”

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/thousands-of-routers-bricked-after-government-program-concludes-in-australia/

Data centers’ energy demand threatens Trump’s “Made in America” plan

PJM has also forecast that electricity demand in its territory

will surpass available supply by 6.6 gigawatts starting in 2027, which the Wall Street Journal describes as equivalent to more than six nuclear power plants.

No easy fixes

Some US manufacturers have raised the prices paid by customers to partially offset their own rising electricity bills, or are even considering relocation of their businesses, Reuters reported. The Wall Street Journal highlighted warnings from steel industry executives that production outages could become more likely if local power grids are overwhelmed by demand. Such results would likely undercut the competitiveness and viability of US manufacturing, which the Trump administration claims to have prioritized despite the loss of 83,000 manufacturing jobs in Trump's first year back in office.

The White House has touted getting Big Tech companies to pay for new power generation and transmission infrastructure by signing a Ratepayer Protection Pledge, which happens to lack any meaningful enforcement mechanism. The Trump administration also joined state governors in pushing PJM to hold a one-time backstop auction for purchasing new power supply capacity.

But the United States still faces huge challenges in building enough new power generation and transmission lines to support the energy needs of AI data center demand and US manufacturers, not to mention other businesses and residential customers. The Trump administration's efforts to stop renewable energy projects involving wind and solar power have also not helped.

In 2025 alone, the United States saw the cancellation of power projects totaling 266 gigawatts of generation capacity—equivalent to 25 percent of America's current electricity generation capacity and more than the total electricity generation of Texas, according to Michael Thomas, CEO of the Cleanview data platform that tracks renewable

energy and data center projects. Clean energy projects accounted for 93 percent of those project cancellations.

The Trump administration’s cancellations of various wind power projects certainly represented one contributing factor. But other significant patterns included local opposition to renewable energy projects in states such as Ohio and Indiana that were also courting new data center development, along with a lack of new transmission lines leading to high interconnection costs for new clean energy projects, Thomas said. If US states and the federal government are hoping to support local manufacturing, they may need to start making different choices in addressing the rising energy costs of the data center boom.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2026/07/us-manufacturers-energy-costs-soar-because-of-ai-data-center-demand/

SCOTUS lets Texas enforce app store law that Big Tech calls “censorship regime”

The Texas App Store Accountability Act requires app stores to determine people’s ages with a “commercially reasonable method of verification” and to impose restrictions on people under 18. Apple and Google announced plans to comply with the law last year but warned that it would harm users’ privacy.

Laws regulating speech face different levels of scrutiny

depending on their nature. “When the government favors some speakers over others for their content, the law must be subject to strict scrutiny,” Pitman’s decision said.

Pitman decided to apply strict scrutiny because he said the Texas law is content-based. The law excludes certain types of apps operated by nonprofits, government entities, and emergency services, while seeking “to shield minors from certain speech the State deems objectionable or harmful,” the district judge wrote.

The 5th Circuit said Pitman is wrong. “At most, SB2420 regulates speech that ‘proposes a commercial transaction,’ which is subject to intermediate scrutiny,” the 5th Circuit panel said, adding that “app listings propose commercial transactions, regardless of whether any monetary payment is made.”

Paxton says Texas has duty to protect children

The judges’ panel further said the law would likely survive under intermediate scrutiny because it advances important governmental interests unrelated to speech and does not burden substantially more speech than is necessary to achieve those goals.

“Requiring age verification, parental consent, and app-related content ratings likely directly and materially advances Texas’s substantial interest in protecting children’s data, safety, and privacy in a digital world… That some works protected by the First Amendment may be the object of app downloads or in-app purchases does not categorically exempt them from ordinary regulations governing commercial transactions,” the panel said.

The panel also faulted the district court for issuing a

“universal” injunction that prevents the law from being enforced against anyone, rather than a more limited injunction preventing enforcement against the plaintiffs and their members.

After winning in the 5th Circuit, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said that “Texas has not only the right, but the duty, to protect children from the harms of our modern digital space. Parents deserve to know what their children are downloading and to have the ability to stop them from accessing harmful or inappropriate content.”

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2026/07/supreme-court-lets-texas-enforce-age-verification-law-on-app-stores/

FCC to end Biden-era rule that forces ISPs to list all their fees

The groups urged the FCC to preserve machine-readable price information, saying it “clearly benefits consumers by aiding in the development of comparison shopping tools and aggregate market research.” The groups also said that “telephone-based disclosures remain essential to informed consumer decision-making” because they “serve as an important safeguard against scams and misleading offers that may reach consumers via mailers, e-mail, text messages, fake/scam websites, or robocalls.”

ISPs get what they asked for

Another planned change will eliminate a requirement that providers archive all labels for at least two years after a service plan is no longer available. The Utility Reform Network, an advocacy group, told the FCC that the archived labels provide crucial data about how prices and services change over time, and that machine-readable labels are important for affordability research and information accessibility.

The Utility Reform Network also said that itemization of passthrough fees helps prevent bill shock. Displaying an "up to" price instead "would only serve to dilute the effectiveness of the label and increase consumer confusion around how the final price they pay is calculated," the group said.

Cable and telecom lobby groups submitted comments supporting the FCC plan to eliminate or relax various requirements.

"The Commission correctly highlights the complexity and burdens providers have had to undertake to display all 'charges that providers impose at their discretion, i.e., charges not mandated by a government'—including the passthrough of government-imposed fees," USTelecom said. "To comply with this government-imposed fees requirement, providers must create and update hundreds of different labels to account for geographic variability and to ensure that their systems properly queue the label specific to the proper location when the customer inputs their address."

USTelecom said that requiring machine-readable information is only helpful for "third-party researchers who are not the intended beneficiaries of the label" and "has no clear purpose or benefit except for third parties seeking to mine this information."

Urging the FCC to stop requiring the listing of all fees, cable lobby group NCTA said it is burdensome “to create and maintain labels for each and every combination of government passthrough fees.” The NCTA complained that this rule and others “are unnecessary or unhelpful in informing consumers about the services that providers offer and impose an outsized compliance burden on providers.”

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2026/07/fcc-to-end-biden-era-rule-that-forces-isps-to-list-all-their-fees/

NRC is (sort of) getting rid of “as low as reasonably achievable” standard

To replace ALARA, the NRC will start with a limit at which evidence clearly indicates radiation impacts would be apparent and set exposure thresholds below that. From lowest to highest exposure, these thresholds will require increasingly aggressive efforts to limit exposures.

The language of the details is a bit confused, however. As its name implies, the LNT model suggests there are no thresholds below which biological risks go away, and the NRC accepts that model. Yet it’s regulated based on thresholds. It’s also referring to those thresholds as an implementation of an “optimization” approach to safety. But it also quotes a definition of optimization that refers to it as a form of ALARA—which, again, is a term that the NRC wants to get rid

of.

Beyond that action, the rule changes the NRC is proposing largely focus on updating regulations on the use of equipment to monitor exposures. Technology has advanced since the agency last modified its requirements there, and it’s using this proposal to update them accordingly.

Number crunching

Regardless of the confusion, it’s clear that the changes aren’t going to cause the sort of boom in nuclear power that the Trump administration expected in its executive order. One of the key features of the planned rules is that any organization that’s currently in compliance will remain that way without making any changes. Changes will only make sense if an organization thinks it can save money by adopting them.

And, as noted above, those savings for industry will be pretty minimal, with the total estimated at $9.5 million a year. Even if we assume that these savings go only to nuclear power and are ascribed only to dropping ALARA (as opposed to cheaper exposure monitoring, for example), spread out across the 57 nuclear plants in the US, that means just an average savings of a bit over $150,000 per plant.

So, those who viewed ALARA as the cause of all the nuclear industry’s woes will likely be excited to see the NRC eliminate it. But they’ll also be disappointed to find that its scientific foundations remain intact, and the regulatory environment will be minimally changed as a result.

https://arstechnica.com/science/2026/07/nuclear-regulatory-commission-plans-really-minor-changes-to-safety-regs/

Secret Claude tracker shocks users after Anthropic’s anti-surveillance stance

Alibaba has not commented on Anthropic’s accusations, but the company has moved to distance itself from Anthropic’s models amid ongoing scrutiny.

Last Friday, Alibaba banned its employees from using Claude Code for work, the South China Morning Post reported. According to a memo SCMP reviewed, Alibaba told employees the ban came in direct response to concerning news about a tracker Anthropic is using to monitor Chinese users.

“As Claude Code was recently discovered to carry back-door risks, after comprehensive evaluation, Claude Code has now been added to a list of high-risk software with security vulnerabilities,” the memo said.

For Alibaba, ignoring Anthropic’s determination to detect users connected to leading Chinese AI labs is risky.

Unlike individual users who can easily pay for cheap circumvention tech to evade Anthropic’s location blockers without fears of major repercussions, Alibaba could be exposed to legal and compliance risks if caught violating Anthropic’s terms, a source granted anonymity to discuss Alibaba’s Claude ban told Reuters.

For Anthropic, allowing the attacks to continue could hurt the company’s business. Some open source Chinese models are more popular than free and open American counterparts, the Post reported, and Fortune 500 CEOs have made it clear that they’re

searching for cheaper AI solutions. For the US, not only would moving to block Chinese distillation of American models be challenging, but it could also be unpopular—blocking Americans from benefiting from cheaper AI alternatives from China, the Post suggested.

Anthropic tracking crossed “scary boundary”

In this climate, where a chatbot user’s loyalty depends on a cost-benefit analysis weighing the cost of accessing models against their capabilities, Anthropic likely can’t afford to lose user trust as it fights to keep frontier models ahead of China’s.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2026/07/anthropic-outed-for-claude-tracker-that-secretly-monitored-chinese-users/

UK regulator warns of “arms race” to keep up with AI use in financial services

“Is the fact that the chat model might be able to respond to prompts and have a conversation something closer to a recommendation, or guidance?” he asked.

But he also said AI could “democratize” finance by widening access to sophisticated services currently only available to

the richest customers. He said people earning only £20,000 a year could gain access to financial advice usually only available “to somebody who has got £10mn in savings or assets,” adding: “I mean what’s not to like about that?”

His report recommends the FCA convenes public and private sector groups to develop an “AI-enabled financial capability service” that provides free information and guidance to the British public on their financial choices.

Many financial services companies are already piloting AI agents that can autonomously carry out financial transactions for companies and consumers. Mills, who is leaving after eight years at the FCA, said managers would still need to be accountable for the actions of their AI models. “You need a human on the hook for what they’re doing,” he said.

AI is likely to “amplify” the threat of fraud and cyber attacks, the report says, calling for the technology to be used to defend the system from such threats. “Deepfakes, synthetic identities, and personalized social engineering are taking fraud and cyber risks into a new era and changing how fraud and cyber attacks,” it says.

Mills’ report also recommends boosting the FCA’s powers under the “critical third parties” regime that allows it to supervise key technology providers to the financial sector, such as Anthropic, OpenAI, Amazon, Google, and Microsoft.

The government is yet to decide which Big Tech groups to designate under the regime, which allows regulators to impose more robust disclosure requirements, including annual self-assessments and “scenario testing” of their ability to withstand severe disruptions.

The report says the FCA could also seek extra powers under the “designated activities regime” that allows it to regulate specific activities without requiring the firms carrying them out to be authorized.

The FCA board is due to discuss the report from Mills before deciding how to respond to its recommendations.

The watchdog has been criticized by some politicians for a 12-week contract it agreed with US tech group Palantir to test whether its AI systems can help fight financial crime. Some MPs have raised concerns the contract could give US authorities access to sensitive UK financial information. The FCA and Palantir have denied this. Mills declined to comment on the Palantir contract.

This story has been amended to clarify that research commissioned by Sheldon Mills found that a fifth of UK adults were open to using AI models to make financial decisions for them.

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https://arstechnica.com/ai/2026/07/uk-regulator-warns-of-arms-race-to-keep-up-with-ai-use-in-financial-services/

Chemical accidents rise as Trump administration proposes weakening safety rules

The new statistics released by PEER were made public as a result of a lawsuit PEER and other groups filed to compel the Chemical Safety Board to disclose industrial chemical releases as required by the Clean Air Act. A federal judge ruled in

2019 that communities have a right to know what hazardous chemicals are released nearby.

Yet Trump's EPA removed a public data tool designed to inform communities of nearby risks last year. President Trump has also tried to eliminate the Chemical Safety Board by withholding funding, though Congress has continued to fund the agency.

Earlier this year, the administration proposed to significantly weaken RMP rules finalized in 2024 "to reduce regulatory burden" and accepted public comment on the rules until early May.

The Biden administration's strengthened RMP rules require a number of measures to reduce the risk of catastrophic accidents, including safer-alternatives analyses, independent analyses of accidents' root causes, worker participation in accident-prevention plans and preparations to adapt to climate change.

An EPA spokesperson said the agency is reviewing public comments and continues to work toward completing the final rule in late 2026.

"EPA's proposal relies on a rigorous analysis of RMP reportable incidents between 2014 and 2023, which shows accidental releases unequivocally declined significantly over that period," the spokesperson said. "This means that RMP-regulated facilities had successful prevention programs in place before the Biden EPA finalized its nonsensical and burdensome 2024 rule."

The Biden EPA used the same data and came to the opposite conclusion, said PEER's Ruch. Plus, he added, "the conclusion that any decline is due to industry prevention plans is a supposition which the current EPA does not have the data to support."

Meanwhile, chemical accidents resulting in evacuations, injuries, or multiple casualties continue to happen at least once a week.

“With each passing year the risk gets greater because the infrastructure continues to age,” Ruch said. At the same time, he added, “the federal response to it is shrinking.”

This article originally appeared on Inside Climate News, a nonprofit, non-partisan news organization that covers climate, energy, and the environment. Sign up for their newsletter here.

https://arstechnica.com/science/2026/07/chemical-accidents-rise-as-trump-administration-proposes-weakening-safety-rules/

FAA proposal: Supersonic airliners can fly over US cities if they’re quiet

“I’m honestly surprised that the FAA would propose a rule this weak,” Rutherford told the publication.

US lawmakers in Congress have also been pushing forward the Supersonic Aviation Modernization Act. That would require the FAA to allow for overland supersonic flights “so long as the aircraft is operated in such a manner that no sonic boom reaches the ground in the United States.” The bill passed the House on March 24, 2026, and is still awaiting a vote in the Senate.

Another way for quiet supersonic flight

Meanwhile, NASA has been testing a different approach to quieter supersonic flight with the Lockheed Martin X-59 Quesst—a needle-nosed experimental aircraft with an airframe designed to reduce the typical sonic boom to a sonic thump. NASA has relied on perceived levels of decibels (PldB) to evaluate sound levels, with the goal of consistently demonstrating sonic thumps around 75 PldB that would sound like a car door slamming about 20 feet away.

A NASA test pilot and mission integration manager previously told Ars that the X-59 aircraft's future supersonic flight tests over US cities and towns nationwide would provide community feedback on perceived sound levels that could help inform regulations by civil aviation authorities.

The FAA still has time to further refine its proposed noise regulations for overland supersonic flights before attempting to finalize them by mid-2027. The agency also plans to propose another rule later this year that would set takeoff and landing noise standards for supersonic aircraft.

Legalization of quieter overland supersonic flights does not guarantee a successful comeback for commercial supersonic airliners. The Concorde supersonic airliner cut transatlantic flights between New York and London from seven hours to under three hours, but the aircraft's massive fuel consumption made it difficult to sustain profitable operations—never mind recovering the more than $2.8 billion in development costs shared by the UK and French governments.

Boom Supersonic is developing a supersonic airliner called Overture with the goal of delivering the first aircraft to customers by 2029. The company has signed commercial agreements with American Airlines, Japan Airlines, and United

Airlines that give the companies options to purchase the Overture aircraft.

But Boom has also pivoted away from its main goal in recent months to produce natural gas turbines to power AI data centers. Boom CEO Blake Scholl has suggested that revenue from this side venture would help pay for the development costs of the Overture supersonic airline. At the same time, United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby has said he gives Boom a “50/50” chance of getting its supersonic airliner flying.

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/faa-proposal-supersonic-airliners-can-fly-over-us-cities-if-theyre-quiet/

Trump gets OpenAI to offer US 5% stake, far lower than Sanders’ target

In the spring, OpenAI first proposed creating an AI wealth fund that “provides every citizen—including those not invested in financial markets—with a stake in AI-driven economic growth,” FT reported. For society to benefit as much as possible, an OpenAI blog said, an “AI-led future” will likely require “new approaches that give people durable stakes in the systems creating value.”

So far, OpenAI has talked with Trump officials such as Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, as well as Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), sources

told FT.

Sanders has made it clear he's not impressed with the numbers OpenAI is discussing, though. Last month, sources familiar with Sanders' discussions with Altman told AP News that Altman remained "far apart" from the senator on how much stake in OpenAI the American public should have.

At that time, Sanders revealed his legislative proposal, which would create a much larger sovereign public wealth fund.

Sanders' plan requires leading AI firms to pay a one-time 50 percent tax on their stock. Sanders estimated that the tax would yield about $7 trillion, which could be disbursed as direct payments to Americans or invested in programs such as health care, education, and housing.

According to FT, OpenAI has claimed that gifting a 5 percent stake to the US would give Americans more control over AI. But Sanders said the best way to ensure the public benefits from AI is to create a bipartisan Independent Commission for Democratic AI, with members nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate. That commission could use voting shares to block leading AI firms from making decisions that could harm the public, Sanders told AP News.

"The public has got to have a significant seat at the table to make sure that terrible things do not happen to ordinary people, and that in fact, AI benefits ordinary people, not hurts them," Sanders said.

For OpenAI's "conceptual" proposal to work, Congress may have to get involved to implement the mechanisms that would allow the US to take a stake in any AI firms, FT reported. So it seems likely that OpenAI and other firms will be locking horns with Sanders to negotiate what's fair and what keeps the public safe as AI technology rapidly advances and Americans fear job losses, cybersecurity risks, and a range of harms associated with massive data centers needed to power AI

innovation.

Ars could not immediately reach Sanders for comment.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2026/07/openai-floats-giving-us-5-stake-to-win-over-ai-haters/