

Slop (*noun*) “digital content of low quality that is produced usually in quantity by means of artificial intelligence.” This was Merriam-Webster’s word of the year for 2025; indicating that AI-generated content was one of the defining features of the year. The fact that AI is typically seen as a generator of “slop” brings into question whether the technology is worth its negative side effects. AI data centers poison our air and water with carbon emissions, sediments, and hazardous chemicals, while AI tools directly degrade our mental health. Artificial Intelligence is not worth the pollution that it creates, and requires immediate regulation in order to prevent an ecological or mental health crisis.

Air pollution is one of the biggest concerns facing AI development. In 2024, AI data centers used 415 terawatt hours (TWh) of electricity, or around 1.5% of total electricity usage (IEA, 14). Our power is overwhelmingly generated using fossil fuels, and because of that, a 415 TWh increase in power usage equates to a massive increase in carbon emissions. According to a 2025 study by Alex de Vries-Gao, the carbon footprint of AI data centers for 2025 alone was between 32 and 80 million tons of carbon dioxide. Journalist Robert Booth reported on this study in *The Guardian* and made the comparison that this amount of carbon is “equivalent to more than 8% of global aviation emissions.”

Furthermore, when the power grid does not provide enough electricity to satisfy data centers, AI companies will turn to harmful, and sometimes illegal, methods of power generation. In March of 2025, Elon Musk's xAI began evaluating plans for the deployment of methane generators on the campus of their Colossus data centers. The plans, obtained by the Southern Environmental Law Center and published in May, detail xAI's desire to deploy between 40 and 90 hazardous methane generators near several residential areas. These generators emit numerous harmful chemicals, including formaldehyde, and can cause a myriad of health issues ranging from asthma to cancer. The loophole that this plan exploited has since been closed by the EPA, but until that ruling was issued, xAI was poisoning the air of low-income Memphis neighborhoods.

Another pollution concern of AI is the contaminants deposited in water bodies from data center cooling systems. AI data centers generate an immense amount of heat from the processors and spinning disks used to run and store the AI, and in order to maintain efficiency, this heat must be dispelled. The cheapest coolant reservoir is one that already exists, so data centers are typically built on freshwater bodies. However, these freshwater bodies already serve a much more important purpose: drinkable water. According to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute, an AI data center can inhale up to 5 million gallons of water per day, and the roughly 20% that does not evaporate is contaminated to the point of being unusable without treatment. This pollution can cause major problems for people like Beverly and Jeff Morris, a Newton County, GA couple who was interviewed by *The New York Times* in July of 2025. Meta AI built a data center practically in their backyard, and within a year, their water pressure had slowed to almost nothing. The Times reported that the problem was traced back to an increase in sediment

build-up in the couple's well, which was likely caused by the contamination from Meta leaching into the groundwater. Water is one of our most valuable resources, and AI is poisoning it.

As much as AI is polluting our water and air, there is a far more important resource being polluted: our minds. Within the last two years, psychology experts have grown increasingly concerned with the mental side effects of conversing with an AI like a person. Columbia University recently published an article titled "Experts Caution Against Using AI Chatbots for Emotional Support," in which Columbia faculty members break down the risks of using AI as a stand-in for a therapist or confidant. Their primary concern is that LLM-style AIs are designed to be affirming to the user no matter what. Meaning that if what a user says is not outright wrong, the AI will do its best to convince itself and the user that they are correct. This can lead to mental health misdiagnoses when used as a therapist, but when used as a companion can lead to severe isolation, delusions, and in some cases even suicide. Allan Brooks, a 47 year old Toronton, became a victim of this and recently shared his story with *The New York Times*. Over the course of three weeks, OpenAI's ChatGPT tool convinced Brooks that he had discovered a mathematical formula, which he believed could be used to "take down the internet and power inventions like a force-field vest and a levitation beam." Obviously this was not reality, but for 3 weeks ChatGPT was unwavering in its enabling of Brooks' delusion. Allan Brooks had no history of delusions or mental illness, which demonstrates the level of control AI can have over the human mind.

This condition even has an unofficial term: “AI Psychosis.” This term was coined by Dr. Joseph Pierre, a professor of psychiatry at the University of California: San Diego. AI Psychosis is becoming widespread, even forming the basis of a lawsuit against OpenAI. Matthew and Maria Raine recently lost their 16-year old son to suicide, and upon inspecting his phone they discovered that he had been seeking advice for his suicidal thoughts from ChatGPT. The advice that ChatGPT provided was to not seek help from parents or friends, and even offered to write the boy’s suicide note. This unfortunate loss was exacerbated by the current AI landscape, where companies face zero pressure to regulate their products. President Trump has even passed a law that bans states from restricting AI, which is likely to increase the problems being faced.

Many argue that restrictions are unnecessary and that AI’s detriments are outweighed by its benefits, but it's important to distinguish what type of AI is actually beneficial. Specialized AIs can be incredibly useful, but typically do not require data centers in order to operate. The tools are typically not used by many people simultaneously, and do not require large amounts of storage because they are trained on specific information. Large Language Models like ChatGPT and xAI are the opposite of this. They are designed as tools to be used by millions at once, and are trained on as much general-purpose data as possible. This means that for every LLM tool, multiple data centers are needed across the world.

AI has permeated almost every aspect of human life in the past few years, and removing it entirely is likely an impossible task. However, regulation of AI tools is urgently needed. Companies cannot be allowed to poison earth's air, water, and minds with no consequence. Despite the president's ban on state-level regulation, national-level regulation is still possible. The best tool available to most people for affecting AI change is contacting representatives. If enough will vote for AI regulations, the crisis on the horizon can be prevented.

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