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MARYLAND
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Data Centers



Data centers are buildings filled with computers that store information and power the internet. Due to the large size and significant electricity usage of some, data centers are required to follow specific regulations before they can be built and during operation. [Click here](#) to review documents, sampling and reports related to the Frederick Data Center project. Many levels of government are involved in data center development and oversight, each with their own unique roles.

The first step generally involves local zoning. County governments determine the precise location for a data center using zoning maps with appropriate uses. For instance, former commercial or industrial areas or agricultural areas. In some cases, the county may alter zoning to allow data centers. A data center developer may be required to seek special permission, called a special exception or a conditional use permit. When this happens, the county often holds public hearings where residents can participate in the process.

The state's role is twofold. The [Public Service Commission \(PSC\)](#) is the state agency that oversees utility companies. Because some data centers require large amounts of electricity to power servers and cooling systems, the commission regulates and works with power companies to ensure that meeting this demand does not create reliability problems or increase the risk of outages for other customers. The commission also oversees electricity distribution rates and evaluates how major new loads affect the electric grid.

The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) is the state's environmental regulator. The department, often in partnership with county environment departments, provides oversight of both data center construction and operations to ensure that all state and federal laws for pollution control are followed.

During construction, datacenters require the same permits as other buildings to address impacts to stormwater runoff from the construction and new impervious surface, dust control, and monitoring and overseeing groundwater impacts. In some cases, where construction is occurring at brownfields — which are sites with a history of contamination from prior industrial activity — additional restrictions and requirements may be put in place to ensure that contaminants are not disturbed and do not impact nearby residents and the environment.

Once a facility is operational, the state has additional oversight. Since data centers rely on diesel backup generators, we issue permits under the federal [Clean Air Act](#) to limit pollutants like nitrogen oxides. These permits strictly control how long and at what capacity generators can run. Every permit is a public document and requires a local community meeting and comment period before approval.

Data centers requiring water to cool their systems must secure a state permit that sets clear withdrawal limits to protect the local environment under the federal [Clean Water Act](#). Alternatively, they can use water from a local utility, such as a county system, which operates under its own existing state-regulated permit.

If data centers are developed on Brownfield sites, there will be additional assessment and remediation requirements based on potential historical contamination.

[Watch the Amazon information meeting.](#)



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