# UK drought group urges public to delete old digital files to ease water strain



The UK’s National Drought Group has urged citizens to cut water use by fixing leaks, taking shorter showers — and deleting old photos and emails stored in the cloud. The advice, issued after its 11 August meeting, comes as England faces a “nationally significant” water shortfall, with five regions officially in drought and six experiencing prolonged dry weather after the driest first half of the year since 1976.

Helen Wakeham, the Environment Agency’s Director of Water and NDG chair, said “everyone” should act, noting that some data centres still rely on cooling systems that consume large volumes of fresh water.

Data-centre cooling needs are linked to electricity demand, which is rising sharply as AI workloads expand. The International Energy Agency estimates global data-centre power use at 415 terawatt hours in 2024, potentially more than doubling by 2030. Evaporative cooling in older or high-density sites can drive significant water consumption, though many modern facilities use closed-loop systems that sharply reduce drawdown.

Industry figures point out that compute-intensive AI training accounts for a far greater share of data-centre water and energy use than static storage of archived files, making personal cloud clean-ups a symbolic but limited contribution.

Government policy aims to expand AI-capable infrastructure to at least 6GW by 2030, balancing industrial priorities with environmental impact. Cloud operators including Microsoft are trialling near-zero-water cooling designs, though shifting away from evaporative systems can increase power demand, creating trade-offs with decarbonisation goals.

Local opposition to new sites — on grounds from environmental harm to grid strain — is growing, with ministers considering planning-law changes to speed critical builds.

Analysts say household actions help engage the public, but the largest savings will come from industry and regulators accelerating low-water cooling adoption, retrofitting older facilities, and siting new capacity where power and water supplies can sustain it.

The NDG’s appeal, experts add, is a reminder that small, visible steps must be paired with systemic investment and regulation if the UK is to host world-class AI infrastructure while protecting scarce water resources.

Created by [Amplify](https://www.hbmadvisory.com/amplify): AI-augmented, human-curated content.

## Bibliography

1. <https://techinformed.com/government-urges-uk-citizens-to-delete-old-emails/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-drought-group-meets-to-address-nationally-significant-water-shortfall> - The National Drought Group met on 11 August 2025 to address a 'nationally significant' water shortfall in England. The Environment Agency reported five areas are officially in drought with six more in prolonged dry weather after the driest six months to July since 1976. Environment Agency Director of Water and NDG chair Helen Wakeham urged collective action and listed measures such as fixing leaks, installing rain butts and taking shorter showers. The statement also suggested deleting old emails and pictures because data centres require substantial water for cooling. It set out water companies' actions, reservoir levels and urged further investment.
3. <https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/uk-governments-national-drought-group-suggests-deleting-old-photos-and-emails-to-reduce-data-center-water-usage/> - DatacenterDyanmics reported that the UK National Drought Group suggested deleting old photos and emails to reduce data centre water use amid a nationally significant drought. The article explains the NDG’s membership and quotes Helen Wakeham urging simple everyday choices like turning off taps and deleting emails. It notes five areas in drought and six in prolonged dry weather following the driest six months to July since 1976. The piece questions how much water might be saved by deleting files, explains variation in data centre cooling systems and points to the government’s drive to attract 6GW of AI capacity by 2030.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-compute-roadmap/uk-compute-roadmap> - The UK Compute Roadmap, published by DSIT and UKRI, sets out a national strategy to expand AI-capable computing infrastructure. It states the UK will need at least 6GW of AI-capable data centre capacity by 2030, aiming to triple existing capability, and envisages AI Growth Zones with sites supporting at least 500MW each and one exceeding 1GW. The roadmap commits public investment in national supercomputing, the AI Research Resource and infrastructure to attract private capital. It stresses planning and grid upgrades, skills and regional distribution to anchor AI growth, while anticipating further reviews and scaling beyond 2030 as demand evolves urgently.
5. <https://www.iea.org/reports/energy-and-ai/energy-demand-from-ai> - The International Energy Agency’s 'Energy and AI' analysis examines how AI uptake will alter global energy demand. It estimates data centres consumed about 415 TWh in 2024 and projects electricity use could more than double to around 945 TWh by 2030 in its base case, with accelerated servers driven by AI growing far faster than conventional servers. The report warns AI workloads — especially large-scale model training — will substantially increase power and cooling needs in particular countries and regions, stressing the need for scenario planning, renewable integration, grid upgrades and energy policy to manage risks and opportunities and investment.
6. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-cloud/blog/2024/12/09/sustainable-by-design-next-generation-datacenters-consume-zero-water-for-cooling/> - Microsoft’s cloud blog outlines a next-generation data centre design introduced in August 2024 that aims for near-zero water evaporation for cooling. The post describes chip-level liquid cooling and closed-loop systems that avoid continuous fresh water consumption, lowering Water Usage Effectiveness (WUE) and protecting local watersheds. Microsoft reported a fleet average WUE of 0.30 L/kWh and described pilots and sites planned for zero-water cooling. The company acknowledged trade-offs: replacing evaporative systems with mechanical cooling can increase electricity demand even as it reduces water use. The piece presents this shift as part of wider sustainability commitments and supports local water stewardship efforts.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/fdb196e2dec8bdf18eab6b8a6a672cbd> - AP News reported on local opposition to data centre developments in Abbots Langley, illustrating community pushback against data centre expansion. The article describes villagers’ concerns about environmental impact, noise, traffic and strain on local power grids, and notes the national government’s intervention to review rejected planning decisions. It explains the wider context: the UK is promoting data centres as critical infrastructure to attract investment for AI, including a reported £10bn Blackstone project, while residents worry the promised jobs may be automated. The piece highlights global parallels where communities and regulators have paused or blocked proposals over water and energy concerns.