



Public Comments
to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, Air Quality Division
on Air Quality Permitting for an Amazon Data Center in Hamlet, NC

July 30, 2026

My name is Sophie Loeb, and I am a Policy Analyst at the Center for Progressive Reform, and I'm submitting public comments to the Department of Environmental Quality opposing the proposed air permits for the Amazon data center in Hamlet.

The 592 diesel generators proposed by Amazon and the 57 diesel generators proposed by Duke Energy present grave harm to the community. Diesel backup generators installed at data centers emit volatile organic compounds, nitrous oxides, sulfur dioxides, and particulate matter — all regulated air pollutants the EPA labels as hazardous to human health.

Burning diesel for generation can increase respiratory illnesses, heart problems, and neurological conditions. Particulate matter can harm your lungs and heart and worsen asthma. Nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide can harm your lungs, cause breathing problems, and worsen asthma. Benzene can affect your nervous system, cause dizziness and headaches, affect your bone marrow and blood, and cause cancer. In 2019, almost 100,000 deaths were attributable to unhealthy levels of criteria air pollutants, and from 1999 to 2020, almost half a million deaths were attributed to particulate matter pollution alone.

Diesel generators emit 200 to 600 times more nitrogen oxides than a methane gas plant, so even infrequent use of these generators can lead to significant air pollution. Amazon claims these are “emergency” generators, but they can be used for other purposes, and there is no limit on their “emergency” use at the Hamlet facility. Duke plans to run the additional 57 generators 24-7 for up to one year to power the data center until it connects to the grid.

Regulation of these generators is difficult. A study by the Commonwealth of Virginia revealed that its data centers exceeded by 7 percent what air permits allowed for this diesel-based pollution. And that's just one documented example.

We know air pollution unevenly impacts communities of color, low-wealth communities, and/or rural communities. This is true for Hamlet, where over 20 percent of the population lives in poverty. Richmond County, where Hamlet is located, also has higher rates of poverty and chronic illness compared to the rest of the state. Richmond County has a higher daily density of fine particulate matter in micrograms per cubic meter than the rest of the state (higher existing air pollution). Further, Richmond County has higher rates of food insecurity, unemployment, lack of access to medical insurance, chronic illness (diabetes and heart disease, among others) — social determinants of health that underlie and exacerbate additional health burdens (*e.g.* from air pollution).

We encourage the North Carolina DEQ to reject this permit as it will strain a community already overburdened by health disparities and pollution.