

DOCKETED

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Opposition of proposed Data Center in Inyokern, Kern county

Strong Public Opposition Statement: Deny the RB Inyokern Data Center (CEC Docket 26-SPPE-01) (Use this as your comment title)

I am a longtime resident of Ridgecrest / the Indian Wells Valley and strongly oppose the proposed RB Inyokern Data Center by R&L Capital. This 99 MW, 238,000 sq ft industrial facility on 50+ acres at Inyokern and Brown Roads (next to the Chevron station and Hwy 395/178) is a massive mismatch for our small desert community. It must be denied outright. The project's scale, resource demands, and location impose unacceptable burdens on our critically overdrafted groundwater basin, strained power grid, and quality of life while delivering only marginal local benefits.

Why This Project Must Be Stopped

Water Crisis in a Critically Overdrafted Basin: The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Basin is formally designated as critically overdrafted. Current pumping already exceeds sustainable yield, with ongoing adjudication (Phase 2 trial starts June 1, 2026) and chronic shortages for the Inyokern Community Services District (serving ~800 people, with documented well failures and financial insolvency). R&L Capital claims just 37-49 acre-feet per year via "hybrid cooling," but even this low-end figure represents a significant new demand that could spike local pumping, accelerate overdraft, raise resident rates, and complicate water-import pipeline efforts (which remain unfunded and unproven). No independent, worst-case analysis (full evaporative cooling or higher IT loads) has been provided. In a desert already fighting for every drop, this is reckless.

Power and Grid Strain: 99 MW plus 40 massive diesel backup generators will stress our limited transmission infrastructure near China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station. While SCE may claim initial feasibility, any outages, upgrades, or reliability issues will hit residents and Navy operations first.

Noise, Emissions, Traffic, and Quality of Life: 24/7 operations, diesel backups, chillers, and construction traffic will bring constant industrial noise, potential air pollution, and visual blight to a quiet rural area. This is not compatible with surrounding homes, businesses, and the Chevron station.

Economic Reality Check: The promised 30-60 direct jobs (plus claimed indirect/induced jobs) are low for a \$250 million project of this size and footprint. Most specialized roles will likely go to outsiders; tax revenue flows mostly to Kern County, not Inyokern. Opportunity cost is high—what else could that land, water, and power support that actually benefits locals (e.g., housing, small businesses, or resident-

focused renewables)?

⚡ Procedural Shortcuts: Seeking a Small Power Plant Exemption to bypass full CEQA review is inappropriate for a project of this magnitude and impact. The community deserves transparent, comprehensive environmental and economic studies now—not after the fact.

This is not “progress” at any cost. Similar AI data center proposals have faced successful pushback across California (Imperial Valley, Delta region, and beyond) precisely because of water, power, and local burden issues. We should not become a dumping ground for tech’s externalities.

Required Major Concessions (If the Project Were to Proceed—Though Denial Is Preferred)

Even if decision-makers ignore the clear case for outright denial, the following must be legally binding, enforceable, and non-negotiable via a Community Benefit Agreement, conditions of approval, and full CEQA. Anything less makes the project unviable and unacceptable:

1. Water: Strict annual cap at or below developer’s lowest claim (37 AFY max), with real-time public monitoring dashboard, third-party audits, and automatic shutdown penalties for exceedance. Full offsets (e.g., developer funds new sustainable supply or retires equivalent agricultural pumping elsewhere in the basin). No reliance on uncertain imported water pipelines.
2. Power/Grid: Developer fully funds all necessary grid upgrades and reliability improvements with no cost or reliability impact on existing residential or Navy customers. Independent study proving zero brownout/blackout risk to the valley.
3. Noise, Emissions, and Operations: Enforceable limits on noise (measured at property lines, not to exceed rural residential standards 24/7), zero routine diesel generator use except true emergencies (with runtime logs and emissions offsets), and air quality monitoring. All operations must comply with strict Kern County standards.
4. Environmental Review: Full CEQA (not exemption) with independent water, power, traffic, noise, and cumulative impact studies. Public hearings in Inyokern/Ridgecrest, not just Sacramento.
5. Economic Guarantees: Legally binding local hiring (minimum 70% Inyokern/Ridgecrest/Kern residents for construction and permanent jobs), revenue-sharing agreement directing at least 50% of new tax revenue directly to the Inyokern CSD and local infrastructure, and a community fund for ongoing mitigation.
6. Transparency and Accountability: 24/7 public access to water/power usage data, annual independent audits, and automatic revocation/penalties for violations. No future

expansions without new approvals.

7. Community Protections: No eminent domain or adjacent expansions; traffic management plan minimizing impacts; visual screening and landscaping funded by developer; and a dedicated local liaison office.

These concessions are the bare minimum to protect our valley”and in practice, meeting them all would likely make the project economically unfeasible for R&L Capital. That is exactly why this proposal should be rejected now.

I urge the California Energy Commission, Kern County Planning, and local officials to deny the application and protect the Indian Wells Valley. Please add my name to the record for Docket 26-SPPE-01 and schedule full public hearings locally.

Submitted by:

Pamela Crawford