Connect to Planet

Consider a future where connected cars produce more efficient traffic patterns on crowded city streets. Connected buildings are smart enough to reduce their own energy use. Learn how our technology is turning potential into reality. Smart businesses and smart cities are here.

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Water Management

Materiality Assessment Topic: Company water use

Issue Summary

Water is essential to life. It is a vital resource for environmental and social sustainability and economic prosperity. Reducing water use and managing this resource wisely is critical.

Our Position

We have a responsibility to actively manage and reduce our water use wherever possible. Water is crucial for our operations, and our largest water use is to cool many of the facilities that house our network equipment. Water supply challenges can have an impact on our business operations.

Data Highlights

2016 Key Performance Indicators

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Absolute (gallons)	3.282B	3.11B	3.046B	3.089B	2.702B
Water Intensity (gallons/$ thousand revenue)	25.75	24.18	23.15	21.04	19.87
Water Intensity (gallons/ Petabyte network traffic)	62,853	49,007	39,918	26,821	25,225

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Our Action

Water is deeply important to the communities we serve and to our own operations. The network that forms the core of our business requires a controlled and cooled environment, and water is a critical input to the cooling equipment we use to create these conditions. We're working to manage our own water use, and at the same time, we're supporting the development of water management technology for customers and other organizations.

Our Operations

Water Management

Analysis of our water footprint has shown that our water use is concentrated in a small number of facilities.

- Our top 125 water-consuming facilities constitute almost 50% of our overall water consumption, and
- 40 of these 125 sites are in "high" or "very high" water stress regions, as determined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development's (WBCSD) Global Water Tool.

Modeled after our Energy Scorecard, we've created a Water Scorecard to guide the tracking and management of water usage at our facilities and to identify water-saving opportunities using an intuitive grading system. AT&T's Water Scorecard includes using the WBCSD Global Water Tool to evaluate water risk over the next five years.

Through our Water Scorecard, we evaluated our top 125 water-consuming sites at the facility level across the country and found that cooling towers, which use evaporation to begin the mechanical cooling cycle, provide our biggest water-saving opportunity and best financial return. These pieces of equipment, which help chill large buildings, account for 25% of an office building's daily water use on average—and they account for an even larger percentage in buildings such as data centers. In this video, Tim Fleming, Director of Sustainability Integration at AT&T, explains how cooling towers function and why they are water-intensive.

In 2016, AT&T's water conservation efforts included:

- 44 projects yielding annualized water savings of 2,988,876 gallons. This includes 11 cooling tower/HVAC projects (one in Pontiac, MI, and ten in California in support of the water conservation efforts); and

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- A water dashboard that was developed to track and manage the water reduction and consumption efforts in the West, an effort that the AT&T President of California initiated.

Water Goal

AT&T has committed to reducing our electricity consumption relative to data growth on our network by 60% by 2020, and we look forward to doing the same with water. We are committed to reducing the water consumption of our company relative to data growth on our network by 60% by 2020 (using a 2013 baseline).[i]

Since 2013, when we set our first water goals, we've seen an overall annualized water savings of 350 million gallons. In addition, we realized 767 million kWh of annualized electricity savings associated with the introduction of free-air cooling projects and the reduction of mechanical refrigeration. The reduction of mechanical refrigeration is important to include, as those technologies consume a great deal of water.

Developing Solutions

AT&T products and services can also help others manage their water use. Our company provides connectivity for monitoring systems so that users can monitor their water use remotely and in real time.

Some examples include:

- We work with HydroPoint, a provider of smart water management solutions, to help customers remotely monitor and manage their irrigation systems. This collaboration ultimately saves 15 billion gallons of water in a single year. Click here to watch a video about AT&T and Hydropoint.
- AT&T teamed up with Mueller Water Co. and IBM in the National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST) Global Smart Cities Challenge to demonstrate how cellular-based technology can eliminate unnecessary water loss. Our team places sensors in water distribution infrastructure to collect data about pressure, temperature and leak detection. That data is then wirelessly transmitted to a smart dashboard that is monitored by a utility. These technologies ensure security for our water distribution infrastructure while reducing unnecessary waste of this critical resource.
- In 2012, we engaged the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) to develop a set of tools and goals around cooling-related water efficiency. The result of our work was a Water Management Application, or WaterMAPP, a toolkit of resources that can be used to manage water and identify opportunities for increased efficiency.

Working with Suppliers

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Although we are not experiencing significant direct water risks from our supply chain, water is critical to our suppliers' operations, and any impact they experience due to water risk may affect our future business operations. That is why our Supplier Sustainability Assessment includes an analysis of our suppliers' water use policies. The assessment was sent to approximately 500 suppliers representing about 80% of our total annual spend. In 2016, we found that more than 200 suppliers have a water use policy, an increase from 130 in 2015. And more than 220 suppliers are tracking their water use, an increase from 150 in 2015. Additionally, more than 140 of our suppliers have water reduction goals, an increase from 100 in 2015.

For more information on all our efforts with suppliers, please see Engaging Our Supply Chain.

[i]For the purposes of tracking progress toward our goal, we are holding refrigerants, engines and portable generators steady in an effort to align performance with actual emissions changes and avoid an inaccurate representation of our progress.

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