

INTELLIGENCE UPDATE

Data center operators gather sustainability data, but quietly



Andy Lawrence 14 Aug 2026

Less than a year ago, Uptime Intelligence published a report examining one of the findings from the 2025 Uptime Institute data center survey: data center operators were collecting less data on resource use and carbon emissions (see [Why are operators collecting less sustainability data?](#)). Sustainability concerns seemed to be waning.

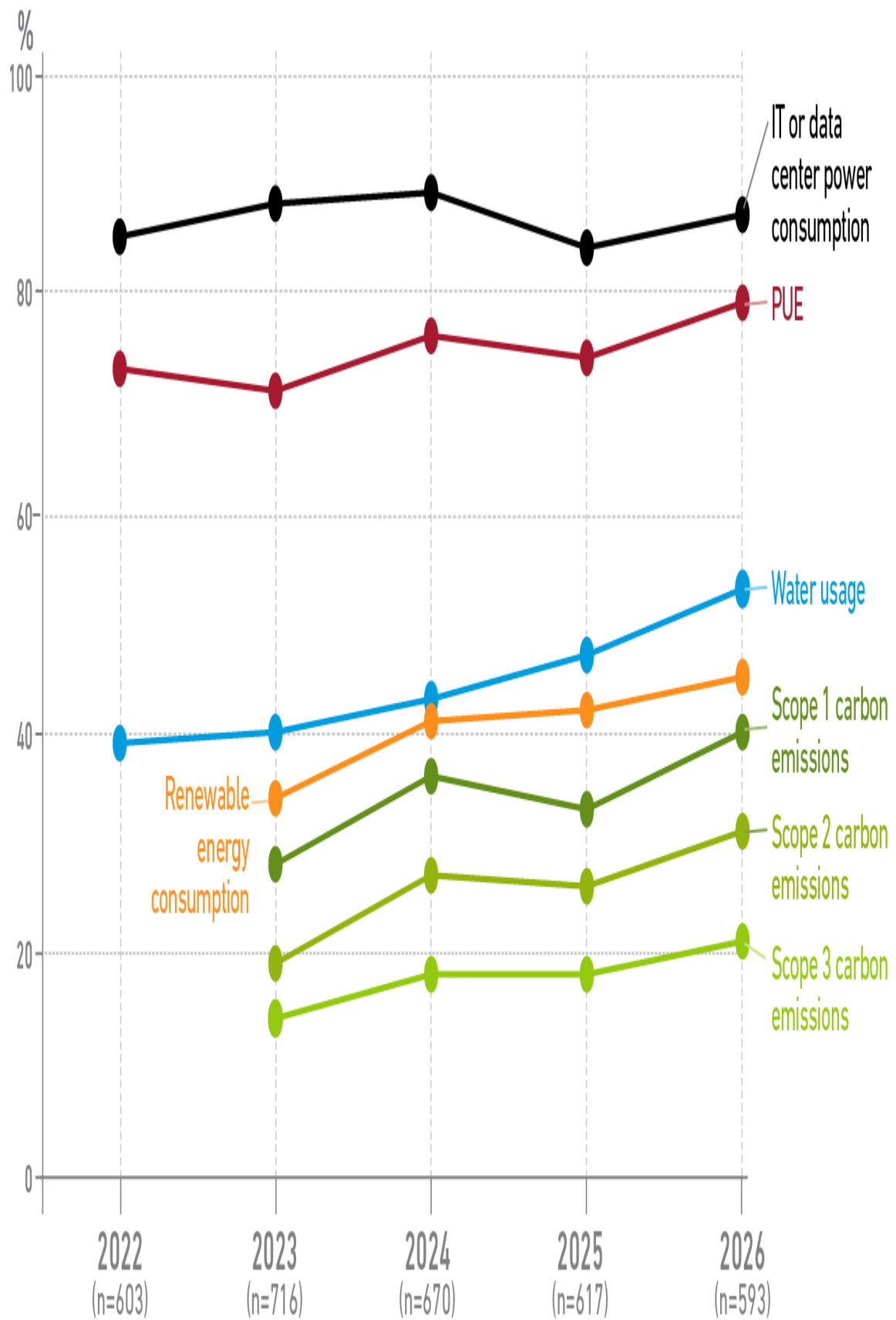
The reasons seemed clear: amid the energy hungry (and sometimes water thirsty) AI build out, collecting and reporting data (which could reflect poorly on organizations) became less important for some, a distraction for others, and not worth the effort for a few. In addition, in the US, sustainability became entangled in divisive politics. It was unsurprising that some organizations appeared to be scaling back their sustainability programs.

Despite this, the headline findings in 2025 were at odds with what Uptime's engineering consultants and the Uptime Intelligence Sustainability and Energy team were hearing from the market. They reported that most operators, even those with an appetite for large scale AI, remained committed to sustainability. This chimed with a Harvard University report by Kelly Cooper and Neil Hawkins that we also cited last year (see ["Constancy of purpose" under pressure: an observational study examining how political shifts are transforming corporate sustainability and DEI](#)). In a survey, the authors found a "bifurcation between what companies say and what they do." Although 85% of organizations had maintained, or even expanded, their sustainability programs, only a small percentage publicly reaffirmed them: a practice known as "greenhushing". Uptime Institute's survey data shows little change in the proportion of data center operators with a net-zero target from 2022 to 2025 (about half) — but these goals may have shifted further into the future.

Turning to Uptime's 2026 findings: the number of operators collecting sustainability data for internal or external use has, following a lull, increased across most categories, including power, PUE, water usage, renewable energy consumption and Scopes 1,2 and 3 carbon emissions (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1 The number of operators collecting sustainability data has increased

Which of the following IT or data center metrics does your organization collect for corporate sustainability purposes whether or not you report it externally? Choose all that apply.



UPTIME INSTITUTE GLOBAL DATA CENTER SURVEY 2026



There are a number of sub-texts and nuances to this data, particularly when broken down by region or by the type of data center collecting the data. European and Asian operators tend to focus more on sustainability and to collect more site-level data (which is recommended by Uptime). Also, colocation companies tend to collect more sustainability data than enterprises, partly due to customer expectations.

The bottom-line message is clear: data center owners and operators are increasingly focused on sustainability, whether or not they report it externally. This is evident even in regions where external pressures from governments and media have eased somewhat.

In some jurisdictions, this is less a matter of choice: reporting on power consumption, water usage and carbon emissions, at the very least, will become mandatory (see previous Uptime Intelligence reports). As Uptime observed last year, those companies collecting and reporting sustainability data internally and voluntarily are wise to do so: data centers are increasingly being classified as critical national infrastructure (see [Critical national infrastructure status: what does it mean?](#)).

Being given critical infrastructure status has many advantages, but it is likely (in most countries) to mean greater operational transparency and reporting. Although the wave of opposition against data center construction is not primarily related to environmental concerns, it is certainly a significant factor behind the strength of opposition. Operators will be expected to demonstrate strong environmental awareness and, ideally, a proactive approach to stewardship.

Despite this, the numbers of organizations collecting and reporting resource use and emissions is still low across some categories. Unsurprisingly, most organizations collect data on power consumption and PUE (although not always at a site level), which both have a near-term financial and competitive impact. Water use is also becoming a necessary metric, even in regions that rarely or never experience water stress, which itself is increasingly rare.

Uptime recommends that operators collect power consumption, PUE, water usage and location-based Scope 1 and location- and market-based Scope 2 emissions data. It also recommends some IT data is collected relating to power consumption, utilization and power management. However, Scope 3 emissions, which is the central metric in many sustainability frameworks, are not currently viewed by Uptime as a key data point. Most operators seem to share this view: four in five do not collect Scope 3 data, preferring to focus on metrics with more meaningful impact. For the same reasons, location-based emissions, rather than market-based emissions, should be closely tracked.

Looking ahead, Uptime strongly recommends collecting site-level data and sharing it, where possible. Even if the results are unfavorable, it helps to identify areas that are challenging or need improvement. As more energy is generated on site, Scope 1 carbon emissions will become an increasingly important data point. Although on-site carbon emissions have mostly been trivial in the past — because little fuel has been burned on site — the rapid introduction of large-scale on-site power is set to change that.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Andy Lawrence

14 Aug 2026

Andy is a founding member and the Executive Director of Research for Uptime Institute Intelligence, which analyzes and explains trends shaping the critical infrastructure industry. He has extensive experience analyzing developments in IT, emerging technologies, data centers and infrastructure, and advising companies on technical and business strategies.

alawrence@uptimeinstitute.com

About Uptime Institute

Uptime Institute is the Global Digital Infrastructure Authority. With over 4,000 awards issued in over 122 countries around the globe, and over 1,100 currently active projects in 80+ countries, Uptime has helped tens of thousands of companies optimize critical IT assets while managing costs, resources, and efficiency. For over 30 years, the company has established industry-leading benchmarks for data center performance, resilience, sustainability, and efficiency, which provide customers assurance that their digital infrastructure can perform across a wide array of operating conditions at a level consistent with their individual business needs. Uptime's Tier Standard is the IT industry's most trusted and adopted global standard for the design, construction, and operation of data centers.

Offerings include the organization's Tier Standard and Certifications, Management & Operations reviews and assessments including SCIRA-FSI financial sector risk assessment, the Sustainability Assessment, and a broad range of additional risk management, performance, availability, and related offerings.

Uptime Education training programs have been successfully completed by over 100,000 data center professionals, such as the much-valued ATD (Accredited Tier Designer) and AOS (Accredited Operations Specialist). The Uptime Education curriculum has been expanded by the acquisition of CNet Training Ltd. In 2023.

Uptime Institute is headquartered in New York, NY, with offices in London, Sao Paulo, Dubai, Riyadh, and Singapore, and full-time Uptime professionals based in over thirty-four countries around the world.

For more information, visit www.uptimeinstitute.com