

NEWS BREAK

Article: **Amazon will pay more than \$20M to settle Oregon pollution claims**

Section: **NW, C3**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, April 5, 2026**, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

Feel free to adapt this lesson for your students. For instance, some educators may assign this as a homework task, while others might facilitate the reading and discussion of questions within small groups or larger class discussions.

****Please take a moment to review all NIE content before classroom use to ensure it is suitable for your students.****

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Learning Objectives:

After reading the article, students will analyze how large companies—specifically Amazon—can impact local environmental issues and how those impacts are addressed through legal and community actions.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A **context clue** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the meaning of the word.

Amazon wasn't the origin of the nitrate pollution, and denies wrongdoing, but critics have alleged the company **exacerbated** the crisis with concentrated runoff from its data centers.

Exacerbated Guess:

Exacerbated Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Amazon agreed Tuesday to pay \$_____ million to settle allegations that its data centers in Morrow County, Ore., contributed to nitrate pollution that has contaminated groundwater in the agricultural community.
2. Nitrates from farm fertilizer, animal manure and wastewater _____ local drinking water for residents living in Morrow and Umatilla counties, according to state reports.
3. A lawsuit continues on behalf of local residents against what four companies and government agencies?
4. "We appreciate Amazon taking the first step toward solving the _____ problem, but the work is far from over," said Steve Berman, attorney for the plaintiffs.
5. His firm said funds from the settlement will support what?
6. "Our _____ draw from the same water supply as other local residents, we don't add nitrates to that water, and the water we return represents a very small fraction of the region's overall system," Amazon said in a written statement Tuesday. "We don't agree with the

allegations in the lawsuit, and we sought an early settlement because we wanted to focus our time and resources on supporting the community rather than on litigation.”

7. Data centers use enormous volumes of water to _____, with much of the water evaporating during the cooling process.
8. Amazon says its data centers used _____ million gallons of water in Oregon in 2024, including 136 million gallons provided by the Port of Morrow.
9. That’s _____% of the total water provided by the port, which primarily supplies agricultural customers and food processors.
10. Amazon has a large installation of data centers in Eastern Oregon, spanning land around Boardman and Hermiston. It’s expanding rapidly and last month acquired nearly 1,300 acres near the Boardman Airport for a project described as Oregon’s first “_____” data center. The company also plans to expand into neighboring Gilliam County.

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

Deeper-Dive “Connect & Explain” comprehension questions for small groups, entire classes or journal entries and/ or essay prompts for extended enrichment:

1. If nitrate pollution comes from many sources (farms, wastewater, companies), who should be held most responsible—and why?
2. Do you think it’s fair that Amazon paid \$20.5 million but did not admit wrongdoing? Why or why not?
3. The article suggests Amazon may have *exacerbated* the issue. Should companies be responsible even if they didn’t start the problem?
4. Data centers use massive amounts of water. Should there be limits on how much companies can use in areas where water quality is already an issue?
5. How would you feel if your household depended on well water that became unsafe to drink? What would you expect from the government or companies?
6. Data centers bring jobs and economic growth. Should communities accept environmental risks for economic benefits?
7. Imagine your family’s drinking water was contaminated. How it would affect your daily life, health, and sense of security.
8. Is it fair that residents rely on settlements (like this one) to get clean water? What does this say about environmental protection systems?
9. Reflect on how your own use of technology (streaming, cloud storage, AI) might connect to environmental impacts like water use.

10. Do you trust large companies like Amazon to act in the best interest of communities? Why or why not?
11. Should large corporations be required to take responsibility for environmental problems they contribute to—even indirectly? Use evidence and reasoning.
12. As Amazon expands its data centers, what ethical responsibilities should it have toward local communities and the environment?
13. With increasing demand for data and technology, what environmental challenges might communities face in the next 10–20 years? How can we prepare?

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