# NAACP demands halt to Elon Musk’s Colossus amid pollution fears as Meta ramps up AI risk automation



This week in technology has brought forth a kaleidoscope of developments, stretching from ambitious AI ventures to stirring environmental debates, encapsulating our ever-evolving relationship with innovation. As we explore the latest, it's essential to reflect on the balance between technological advancement and its societal impacts.

One of the more provocative stories centres on the NAACP’s call for a suspension of operations at Elon Musk’s data centre, Colossus, located in South Memphis. The supercomputing facility has ignited concerns among local communities and environmental advocates due to its significant ecological footprint. The centre, which reportedly consumes vast amounts of electricity and water, operates 18 unpermitted gas turbines that contribute to local air pollution issues. Residents have voiced their apprehensions over the detrimental effects on their health and environment, recalling past corporate reassurances that were left unfulfilled. According to local leaders, while the potential for job creation exists, many fear that the project's environmental costs will outweigh its benefits. This juxtaposition clearly illustrates the dilemma of hosting high-tech facilities in areas that historically struggle with pollution.

In parallel, Meta has announced an ambitious plan to automate the majority of its product risk assessments using AI, aiming for a staggering 90% automation rate. This approach aims not only to streamline processes but to adhere to a 2019 Federal Trade Commission (FTC) settlement that demanded enhanced privacy protections. Critics, however, question the efficacy of AI in evaluating risks associated with its platforms, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, particularly regarding consumer safety. The FTC has cautioned that with the deployment of AI technologies, strict compliance with existing consumer protection standards is paramount, further underscoring the need for robust mechanisms to safeguard users against potential risks.

In an intriguing twist in the realm of aerospace innovation, Welsh startup Space Forge has garnered attention for its ambition to manufacture high-tech materials in space, having recently secured $30 million in funding. The company proposes that the unique microgravity environment of space offers advantages in crafting materials that could revolutionise various industries on Earth. The growing interest in space-based manufacturing signifies a shift towards exploring off-planet resources, as companies seek new avenues for technological advancements unhindered by terrestrial limitations.

Meanwhile, the bold aspirations of SpaceX have become a focal point for both criticism and admiration. Following a series of rocket explosions that have drawn comparisons to cinematic spectacles, experts in the field suggest these failures are integral to the development process. Such incidents highlight the trial-and-error nature of aerospace projects where setbacks can yield crucial insights, albeit tempered with the recognition that public safety remains a persistent concern.

As we wrestle with these complex narratives, it becomes clear that the future of technology is fraught with both promise and peril. The metaphor of Icarus serves as a poignant reminder of the risks associated with unchecked ambition in innovation. High aspirations must be tempered with ethical considerations and a commitment to environmental stewardship. Thus, as we delve deeper into this new tech era, the challenge lies not only in harnessing the power of ingenuity but also in ensuring that progress is made responsibly and transparently.

As the tech landscape continues to shift at an unprecedented pace, remaining informed and vigilant is paramount. Whether it involves the deployment of supercomputers, navigating the ethical ramifications of AI, or venturing into the cosmos, the interplay between innovation and accountability demands our careful attention.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.besttechie.com/tech-news-roundup-the-future-of-ai-and-the-great-space-race/), [[2]](https://time.com/7021709/elon-musk-xai-grok-memphis/), [[3]](https://www.tomshardware.com/tech-industry/supercomputers/elon-musks-nvidia-powered-colossus-supercomputer-faces-pollution-allegations-from-under-reported-power-generators)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.besttechie.com/tech-news-roundup-the-future-of-ai-and-the-great-space-race/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/musks-xai-plans-massive-expansion-ai-supercomputer-memphis-2024-12-04/), [[6]](https://about.fb.com/news/2019/07/ftc-agreement)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.besttechie.com/tech-news-roundup-the-future-of-ai-and-the-great-space-race/), [[7]](https://www.ftc.gov/policy/advocacy-research/tech-at-ftc/2025/01/ai-risk-consumer-harm)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.besttechie.com/tech-news-roundup-the-future-of-ai-and-the-great-space-race/), [[3]](https://www.tomshardware.com/tech-industry/supercomputers/elon-musks-nvidia-powered-colossus-supercomputer-faces-pollution-allegations-from-under-reported-power-generators)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.besttechie.com/tech-news-roundup-the-future-of-ai-and-the-great-space-race/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.besttechie.com/tech-news-roundup-the-future-of-ai-and-the-great-space-race/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/7021709/elon-musk-xai-grok-memphis/> - Elon Musk's AI company, xAI, plans to unveil a powerful AI model, Grok 3, trained largely at a new Memphis data center, which was built in 19 days. However, Memphis residents and city council members, surprised by the project, voiced concerns about its environmental and community impact. The data center is expected to consume massive amounts of electricity and water, potentially worsening local air and water pollution issues. Already, it operates 18 unpermitted gas turbines with high nitrogen oxide emissions. Although local leaders anticipate job creation and infrastructure benefits, others fear exacerbating Memphis's historically high pollution levels and strained utilities. Environmentalists also worry about the data center's substantial daily water withdrawal from the aging, fragile local water system. Residents recall previous unfulfilled corporate promises and remain skeptical of xAI's commitment to genuine community benefits.
3. <https://www.tomshardware.com/tech-industry/supercomputers/elon-musks-nvidia-powered-colossus-supercomputer-faces-pollution-allegations-from-under-reported-power-generators> - Elon Musk’s Colossus supercomputer, powered by up to 100,000 Nvidia H100 GPUs and operated by xAI in Memphis, is under scrutiny for alleged environmental violations. Initially launched with just 7 MW of power—insufficient to operate most of its GPUs—the facility resorted to using over 30 portable methane gas turbines, which are accused of producing hazardous emissions linked to asthma and cancer. Though xAI applied for permits for only 15 turbines, thermal imaging indicated up to 35 turbines being used. Local residents, environmental activists, and the Southern Environmental Law Center are raising concerns about unregulated pollution, utilizing a legal loophole that allows temporary generator use without permits. With ambitions to scale GPU capacity to one million units, the site could soon require 1.55 GW of power. Despite approval for a 150 MW substation, it falls short of the site's current and future demands. A public hearing has been scheduled by the Shelby County Health Department, while anonymous flyers disputing pollution claims have surfaced, prompting political leaders to demand transparency regarding their origin.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/musks-xai-plans-massive-expansion-ai-supercomputer-memphis-2024-12-04/> - Elon Musk's artificial intelligence startup xAI is planning a significant expansion of its supercomputer in Memphis, Tennessee. The supercomputer, named Colossus, will increase its capacity to at least one million graphics processing units (GPUs) from the current 100,000 GPUs, to enhance xAI's chatbot, Grok. Key partners Nvidia, Dell, and Super Micro will establish operations in Memphis to support this expansion. The move underscores Musk's ongoing rivalry with OpenAI and its CEO Sam Altman, as Musk recently expanded his lawsuit against OpenAI, accusing them of attempting to monopolize the AI market. However, this expansion raises environmental concerns due to the high energy consumption of data centers, with local activists and lawmakers scrutinizing xAI's energy sources and compliance with air permits.
5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colossus\_(supercomputer)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colossus_%28supercomputer%29) - Colossus is a supercomputer developed by Elon Musk's xAI, launched in September 2024 at the former Electrolux site in South Memphis to train the AI language model Grok. The facility was constructed in a remarkably short period of 19 days, repurposing the existing building to expedite the process. The location was chosen for its proximity to a wastewater treatment facility, providing a water source for the supercomputer's cooling needs. As of February 2025, xAI plans to build an $80 million facility to process additional wastewater for use at the supercomputer. The project has raised environmental concerns due to its substantial electricity and water consumption, as well as emissions from gas turbines used to power the facility.
6. <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/07/ftc-agreement> - In July 2019, Meta (formerly Facebook) reached a comprehensive agreement with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to enhance privacy protections for its users. The agreement introduced more stringent processes to identify privacy risks, increased documentation of those risks, and implemented measures to ensure compliance with new requirements. Meta committed to a fundamental shift in its approach to privacy, placing additional responsibility on product development teams to adhere to these standards. The agreement also included a $5 billion penalty, marking one of the largest fines imposed on a company for privacy violations at that time.
7. <https://www.ftc.gov/policy/advocacy-research/tech-at-ftc/2025/01/ai-risk-consumer-harm> - In January 2025, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) highlighted the risks associated with artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and their potential to harm consumers. The FTC emphasized that companies deploying AI systems must comply with existing laws, including those related to competition and consumer protection. The agency outlined various concerns, such as privacy violations, adversarial attacks compromising personal data, and the use of AI in fraudulent activities. The FTC also noted the importance of preventing harm before and after deploying AI products, urging firms to proactively address associated risks to protect consumers.