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ENVIRONMENT

Google Backs Plan to Map Pollution Coming From Every Power Plant in the World

The effort could be a key tool in the fight against climate change.



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By [Joe McCarthy](#) and [Erica Sanchez](#)

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Why Global Citizens Should Care

Power plants are the biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the world. This new program could put pressure on companies and governments to reduce emissions and pollution levels. You can join us in taking action on this issue [here](#).

A new [Google-backed initiative](#) seeks to use satellite data and artificial intelligence to map out global emissions from power plants to help ordinary people hold major drivers of climate change accountable.

Satellites positioned around the world will use infrared sensors and other forms of observation "to track air pollution coming out of every single power plant in real time," according to Chiel Borenstein, chief of operations and partnerships at WattTime, the organization behind the new effort.

This information will then be analyzed by artificial intelligence software that will grow smarter and more capable over time. For example, initial analysis might

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What to Know

Over 100 million people could be driven into extreme poverty through climate change by 2030.

Smallholder farmers need support to survive the impact of climate change — and keep feeding their communities.

World leaders must support the fight against climate change now.

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Borenstein said that data from the satellites will be made publicly available, so citizens can then use the information to call on politicians and companies to reduce emissions.

"If you've been sick for the past three years in Russia or Saudi Arabia or India, and there's a power plant down the road, and you don't really know what's going on with it, how it's doing in terms of the Paris [climate] treaty, now we can get a sense [of the emissions]," Borenstein told Global Citizen.

"Giving that data to everyday people will have massive implications in terms of transparency, access, and accountability," he added.

Borenstein suggested that this data could spur authorities to enforce energy



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Google gave \$1.34 million to WattTime to develop the system as part of its Google AI Impact Challenge. Other winners of the grant include organizations that will use AI to detect illegal mining, improve irrigation methods, and help doctors in low-income areas administer the right medicines.

WattTime's core product is technology that helps consumers and energy providers reduce greenhouse gas emissions by responding to fluctuations in supply and demand.

The new project broadens the organization's scope but aligns with its mission to help consumers have more control over the type of power they receive in their homes.

It also has implications for the future health of the planet.

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Air pollution is one of the leading causes of premature deaths around the world, killing an estimated 8.8 million people prematurely each year, and triggering health problems in all parts of the human body.

Greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, meanwhile, are the main driver of climate change, which threatens ecological catastrophe by the end of the century.

Globally, a lack of data on emissions levels has hindered understanding of the scale of climate change. While this new satellite program won't measure every source of greenhouse gas emissions, it could bring a major contributor out from the dark and into the light.

"We consider ourselves environmental stewards, and our main goal is to give citizens the ability to know what's really going on," Borenstein said. "The reason this project was funded by Google is because it has massive implications and positive spillovers on a global realm."

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