

What is behind the Corpus Christi water crisis?

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Corpus Christi, Texas, a coastal industrial city of over 300,000 people, is in stage 3 drought restrictions, with regular lawn watering and automatic irrigation systems not allowed.

Officials are warning that the city could enter a water emergency in the next two months and fall short of supply in six months. Two of the city's three main reservoirs have shrunk below 10 percent capacity. The city may soon announce a mandatory 25 percent usage cut for residents.

The city, the eighth-largest in the state, supplies a number of water-intensive industries in and around it, which account for 50 to 60 percent of its total water usage.

Corpus Christi has faced increasingly volatile rainfall patterns, featuring extreme swings between drought and heavy rain, contributing to the ongoing historic drought. Last year was the 19th driest year on record, while 2021 was the wettest in 30 years. These variations are the result of climate change, induced in no small part by the very same petrochemical companies operating in and around the city,

The Corpus Christi water system supplies a total of 500,000 people across seven counties. Just one plastic plant, the Gulf Coast Growth Ventures, a joint venture between ExxonMobil and SABIC (which is 70 percent owned by Saudi ARAMCO), accounts for 25 million gallons per day, equivalent to the consumption of all city residents combined.

The Valero refinery and ExxonMobil ethylene cracker plant combined consume one quarter of the total system supply. A nearby Tesla lithium plant in Robstown, Texas is also taking in an estimated 1.1 to 3 million gallons a day, with a potential peak of 8 million gallons, which would be eight times the residential water use of Robstown itself. Flint Hill Resources and

Citgo also operate refineries in Corpus Christi.

To safely wind down ethylene crackers and refineries to a point where water isn't being consumed could likely be accomplished in days or weeks. Restarting a plant after restoring water access could take weeks. However, despite the impending crisis, none of this is being planned. Clearly the millions in profits these facilities generate weigh far more than resident's access to water.

The city received approval from the state to continue pumping 40 million gallons of water from Lake Texana on an emergency basis, even if the lake falls below 50 percent of capacity, which typically would trigger mandatory cuts. In response to estimates that this level would be reached by April, Texas Governor Greg Abbott reset the threshold to 40 percent, after which emergency usage cuts would be triggered.

Corpus Christi Water is already spending \$1 billion to drill for groundwater to bolster water supplies. Groundwater is already being pulled at an unsustainable rate, which could lead to water quality issues for residents.

While the emergency use of the lake would keep industry functioning, it could lead to long-term issues for aquifer sustainability and reduce water quality as nutrients and metals in the water are concentrated. The drop in water level in the reservoir poses a threat to human health by increasing the concentration of bacteria, like E. coli, and parasites. Both of these biological contaminants thrive in stagnant, warmer water, and their growth is facilitated by the drop in water levels.

Abbott's scam "solution" to the water crisis

Water experts have warned repeatedly about the mismatch between projected demand and supply for over a decade. The city already faced multiple water contamination incidents and boil notices in 2015 and 2016 due to supply not keeping up with demand. Despite this, city and state leaders have worked to attract more industry to Corpus Christi while doing little to alleviate the looming water crisis. Abbott has celebrated billions of dollars in investments in the Coastal Bend region, including major projects by ExxonMobil and Saudi ARAMCO (Gulf Coast Growth Ventures) and the Tesla lithium refinery in Robstown.

The state and local government, in collusion with industry, are conspiring to force the cost of infrastructure upgrades for industry onto residents of the city, overwhelmingly the working class. Abbott is trying to get the city to foot the bill for another \$1 billion for a desalination plant. Essentially, it's a scam.

This takes the form of an emergency \$757 million loan from the state to the city, to be paid for by taxpayers of course, for the construction of an almost \$1 billion desalination plant. A previous version of the plan failed with voters balking at the costs of the originally planned desalination plant, which ballooned from an estimate of \$160 million in 2019 to \$1.2 billion by mid-2025.

Corpus Christi produces around 5 percent of total US refined products, including gasoline. The mouthpieces of the oil companies in the corporate media are attempting to use the risk of even higher gas prices to push through the corporate bailout.

The simple fact of the matter is that the oil companies can more than pay for higher projected water costs and to keep higher gas prices at bay, while still having profits left over.

ExxonMobil's planned capital expenditure for 2026 is \$27 billion to \$29 billion. The desalination plant would constitute a 4 percent increase in Exxon's capital expenditure. The cost would be a fraction of a fraction if all the water-sucking industries pitched in.

ExxonMobil made \$37.2 billion for its shareholders. It will likely make hand-over-fist profits for 2026 due to the US imperialist war of aggression on Iran. Valero paid \$4 billion in dividends and stock buybacks in 2025, with a net income of \$2.3 billion. SABIC is planning \$4 billion in investments for 2026. This does not even include their dividends to shareholders. In

2025, Not to mention Tesla, which is owned by Elon Musk, a man set to be the first trillionaire. Musk could singlehandedly pay for the desalination plant and regard it as small change.

This could also be done in a way that does not destroy the environment or local fishing industry. Methods have been developed, through advances in science and engineering, to mitigate or prevent environmental destruction.

What is necessary is for the working class to expropriate the financial elite and seize control of the large corporations, managing and planning them democratically and scientifically so as to prevent man-made catastrophes like the one unfolding in Corpus Christi and the broader climate disaster within which it is taking place.

Workers should demand the plants which are endangering the water supply of Corpus Christi should be shut, and workers affected be retained while being paid their full wages, until it is deemed safe by scientists to reopen.



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