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[skeptics]

Is the sewage from the Burj Khalifa transported away by trucks?

Asked 3 months ago Active 1 month ago Viewed 51k times



82

There are several articles and videos on the net claiming that the [Burj Khalifa](#) tower in Dubai is not connected to a wastewater treatment plant by a sewer system, but that instead the sewage is transported away using trucks. Examples:



6



- inhabitat.com: ["it isn't hooked up to a municipal wastewater treatment system – so when you poop in the Burj Khalifa, that waste is actually trucked out of the city."](#)
- gizmodo.com: ["The trucks take all this poop to a sewage treatment facility outside of the city. It's the same with most skyscrapers in Dubai, according to Kate Ascher, author of The Heights."](#)
- wonderfulengineering.com: ["The skyscraper \[...\] is not connected to a municipal wastewater treatment system. In simple words, the poop collected from the building is carried out of city via trucks."](#)
- en.wikipedia.org: ["Sewage from areas of Dubai not connected to the municipal piped network"](#)

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- 32 If 4 different, independent websites claim the same thing, what will convince you it is true? How many more links will it take? And if a website claims otherwise, why will you believe that one? – [hdhondt](#) Aug 15 at 10:22
- 67 @hdhondt: good question. It's just that a) the claim seems kinda unbelievable to me (who would spend lots of money and effort on an enormous skyscraper but not build a sewer system for it?), and b) I don't know whether these websites are reliable on this fact - maybe they have just copied from the same source, and maybe even omitted some key details (all of these articles are quite short, in my opinion). – [oliver](#) Aug 15 at 10:30
- 18 The wikipedia page says nothing about the Burj Khalifa, which has been connected to the municipal sewer system from day one. – [David Hammen](#) Aug 15 at 12:33
- 23 @hdhondt: The number of references that a "fact" has on the Internet is not a reliable indicator of veracity. Numerous news media outlets and web sites routinely cite each other's source material without doing a fact check. – [Robert Harvey](#) Aug 16 at 19:13
- 6 @hdhondt This is the citogenesis problem. You have no guarantee that those 4 (or really, N) websites have collectively made more than one independent primary research on the topic. This is true regardless of the "mainsteam reliability" of a news source. – [Kafein](#) Aug 17 at 13:20

2 Answers

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▲ 145 ▼ This story has an inkling of truth, but the specific claim raised in the title of the question is false. The one link in the question that is correct (or at least was correct in 2015) is the link to the Wikipedia page, which does not mention the Burj Khalifa. Sewage from the Burj Khalifa is not transported away by trucks.



From [Mechanical and Electrical Systems for the Tallest Building/Man- Made Structure in the World: A Burj Dubai Case Study](#)



A complete soil, waste and vent system from plumbing fixtures, floor drains and mechanical equipment arranged for gravity flow and, ejector discharge to a point of connection with the city municipal sewer is provided. A complete storm drainage system from roofs, decks, terraces and plazas arranged for gravity flow to a point of connection

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GROSS: Right. So you know, you write that in Dubai they don't have like, a sewage infrastructure to support high-rises like this one. So what do they do with the sewage?

ASCHER: A variety of buildings there [Dubai]; some can access a municipal system, but many of them actually use trucks to take the sewage out of individual buildings. And then they wait on a queue to put it into a wastewater treatment plant. So it's a fairly primitive system.

Note that Ascher did not claim in this interview whether the Burj Khalifa was or was not connected to the municipal sewer system. Apparently the specific claim started with a [BoingBoing article](#) written the very next day in a poorly researched article Gizmodo next used the BoingBoing article as the source for its poorly researched article.

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edited Aug 16 at 9:58



SQB

3,269 ● 2 ● 20 ● 47

answered Aug 15 at 12:30



David Hammen

11k ● 8 ● 44 ● 43

40 Wow, thanks for looking up where that wrong information came from! Your explanation makes a lot of sense to me. – [oliver](#) Aug 15 at 13:59

24 Ascher did actually give that impression, or at absolute minimum fail to correct Gross incorrectly claiming it, per the [NPR transcript](#). "ASCHER: The tallest building in the world is... the Burj Khalifa... GROSS: GROSS: Right. So you know, you write that in Dubai they don't have like, a sewage infrastructure to support high-rises like this one..." Anyone reading/hearing that would make the same inference. – [smci](#) Aug 16 at 1:19

9 @smci That certainly is a possibility. Ascher published her book in 2011, which meant the reporting on a 2009 incident in Dubai was still on her mind. Problems in one of Dubai's sewage treatment plants resulted in that plant being shut down for a few weeks. Some of that reporting implied that the vacuum truck solution used during those few weeks was what Dubai used all the time. – [David Hammen](#) Aug 16 at 3:48

34 Relevant XKCD: xkcd.com/978 – [nick012000](#) Aug 16 at 5:35

9 Which sounds absurd, but then building a nearly 1 km-tall tower *also* sounds absurd. My point was that dismissing the claim as "ridiculous on the face of it" because it assumes regular servicing is not necessarily the slam-dunk that the other poster intuited it to be. – [Sneftel](#) Aug 16 at 11:58

All statements seem to be true to some extent:

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The processing plants will have sufficient capacity to treat all the output by 2020 in theory, thanks to an increase in investment.

thanks to new major investments

5. The Burj Khalifa HAS access to the sewer system
6. Due to the processing plant not being able to handle the load AND the Burj Khalifa as well as other new buildings going live, some parts of the system seemed to have been disconnected from the processing plant and the trucks introduced to take the excess output into another plant which also filled up its capacity though hence the long line of trucks. NOTE: poop is not stated to be transported from such buildings directly via trucks but instead parts of the network seem to have been disconnected (or not connected at all to a processing plant) and pumps used in several locations to get the output into the trucks.
7. It is not explicitly stated if the Burj Khalifa output is ending up on the trucks but since it was one of the major contributors of the overload it can be assumed with relatively high certainty that it has been so for several years. Still it would be possible that the building has been connected to the plant at the expense of other existing buildings, or the plant getting smaller updates to its capacity allowing this particular building to be connected shortly after going live

This the assumption of the particular building not being connected directly to a plant and its output being trucked away seems to be have been likely correct but not explicitly confirmed and might have also changed at any time after the building has gone live

A lot of these statements are confirmed in the [Wikipedia page itself](#). [This video](#) seems like a good summary with further links to sources:

- <https://bit.ly/2H3yw8O>
- <https://bit.ly/2SmyrSR>
- <https://bit.ly/2UCYaZl>
- <https://reut.rs/373BlvD>
- <https://bit.ly/2S6teiQ>
- <https://bit.ly/2OzPYpw>

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edited Oct 21 at 14:03



Glorfindel

905 ● 1 ● 11 ● 24

answered Oct 21 at 8:14



Jane

31 ● 2

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