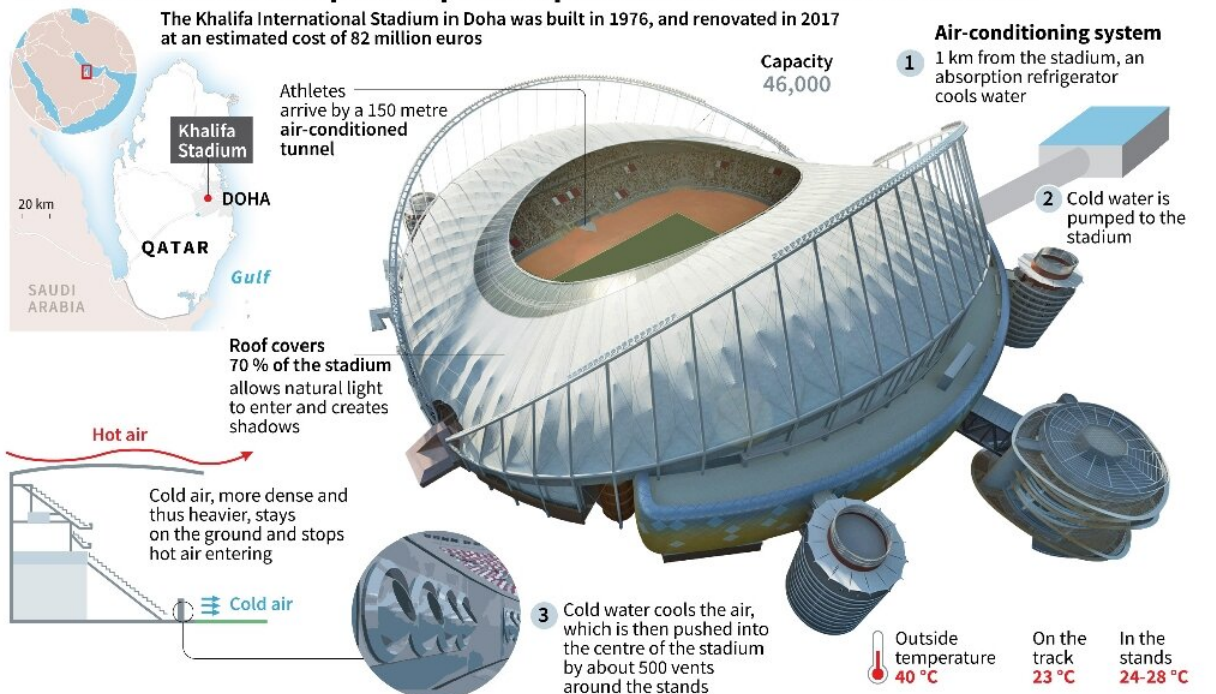


Hot air? Qatar claims stadium cooling not eco risk

September 27 2019, by Gregory Walton

World Athletics Championships: an open and air-conditioned stadium



The World Athletics Championships in Doha will take place in a stadium that is open but air-conditioned

As the World Athletics Championships get underway in Qatar on Friday, the environmental cost of holding a top-tier sporting event in a sweltering desert has been thrust into the global spotlight.

Organisers insist they have taken steps to mitigate the impact of the athletics showcase and that the far larger 2022 football World Cup, also due to be held in the Gulf monarchy, will be carbon-neutral.

But climate activists are skeptical, warning that events which rely heavily on energy-hungry air conditioning, desalination, [single-use plastics](#) and inbound air travel can never be truly green.

"Air conditioning around stadiums is not environmentally sound, it will only add to the emissions," warned Greenpeace executive director Zeina el-Hajj.

Doha's Khalifa stadium, the venue for the World Championships, will be maintained at a pleasant 23-25 degrees Celsius while the outside daytime air temperature exceeds 40 degrees and humidity hovers above 50 percent.

The sophisticated system is being held up by Qatari authorities as proof they will be able to keep venues for the World Cup at comfortable temperatures, despite concerns over the impact of the Gulf climate.

Greenpeace says the [cooling systems](#), which is replicated at the seven other World Cup stadiums, could "become more sustainable" if they were powered by solar energy, which Qatari authorities say they want to use.

"None of that is currently running in Qatar yet," said el-Hajj.

"Good amount of energy"

The man behind the stadium cooling systems, engineering professor Saud Abdul Ghani, acknowledged that they used "a good amount of energy" and would rely on polluting backup diesel generators in the

event of a power cut.

But he insisted that reducing stadium temperatures resulted in just one-fifth of the emissions produced to cool similarly-sized airport atriums.

Ghani said that even though all of the eight stadia, including Khalifa, will have open roofs during the World Cup, the cooled air would not be squandered.

"Pumping out cold air is a bit crude... God will just make that disappear," he said.

"We pump the exact amount of cold air into the exact place—then recycle it all."

Qatar's ruler vowed this week to put the country and its high-profile sporting events on an environmentally-friendly track.

"We are committed to organizing an eco-friendly tournament and the first 'carbon-neutral' tournament through the use of [solar energy](#) in stadiums and the use of energy-efficient cooling, lighting technology and water," said emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani at a UN event on climate change in New York.

But the challenges to delivering a truly carbon neutral tournament will be formidable.

Other than the obvious environmental challenge of keeping stadia in the desert cool, even though the tournament will play out in the milder winter months, air travel will be an issue.

Unlike recent World Cup tournaments where fans have had the option of traveling by rail and road from neighboring countries, all 2022-bound

supporters will have to travel by air or, in some cases, sea.

That is because Qatar is subject of an economic boycott led by Saudi Arabia, the only country with which it shares a land border.

Riyadh, along with nearby Bahrain, as well as the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, cut off direct air, land and sea links in protest at what they say is Doha's support for Islamist groups and Iran. Qatar denies the claim.

The regional economic embargo meant that in addition to the closure of Qatar's only land link to the outside world, plans for a high-speed rail link connecting Doha to Bahrain and the wider Gulf region were put on ice.

'Decreased usage of cars'

World Cup organizers insist that the tournament in Qatar will eliminate the need for domestic flights which were essential at the three previous tournaments in South Africa, Brazil and Russia events.

"The fact that there's no air travel within the country, that eliminates a lot of your carbon that is emitted during tournaments," said Nasser al-Khater, chief executive of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

"The fact that the metro now is going to be available for fans to use is going to take a lot of carbon out of the environment because of the decreased usage of cars and buses."

Khater added that the organizers were working to make stadiums "as environmentally friendly as possible."

"From using lighting systems and water systems that are extremely

sustainable, the [power generation](#) for these stadiums was something that we looked at," he said.

"There was a big discussion on solar power and what Qatar committed to do was solar-powered generation plants in Qatar before the World Cup."

Organisers will use carbon credits and plan to plant thousands of trees to offset emissions.

Mohammed Ayoub, senior research director at the Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute, warned that [solar power](#) may not prove to be a fix-all solution.

"Solar cells are facing challenges related to high temperature, which reduces efficiency and also accumulation of dust," he told AFP at a recent climate vigil staged by schoolchildren, with the approval of authorities.

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