



# Tox Town

Environmental health concerns and toxic chemicals where you live, work, and play

[toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/flash/southwest/flash.php](http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/flash/southwest/flash.php)

*The National Library of Medicine (NLM) in Cooperation with the Navajo Nation's Diné College Present...*

## Tox Town – Environmental Health Risks in the US Southwest

Should I worry about drinking water from a rural private well? What is fracking and can it be dangerous for me? What are uranium tailings and how can they affect my health?

The answers to these and many other environmentally-themed questions can be found in the new US Southwest scene that is now part of the landscape of Tox Town ([toxtown.nlm.nih.gov](http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov)).

While some environmental health concerns in the US Southwest are the same as in any neighborhood, there are many issues that are specific to this region. New Tox Town locations found in this scene include:

- Abandoned Mines
- Sheep Ranching
- Uranium Tailings
- Water Wells
- Windmills
- Oil and Gas Fields
- Coal-Fired Power Plants
- Dust Storms
- Hydraulic Fracturing
- Irrigation Canals and Ditches

## Explore the US Southwest Locations

The screenshot shows the Tox Town website interface. At the top left is the National Library of Medicine logo and the 'Tox Town' title. Below the title is a navigation menu with links: Home, Text Version, Neighborhoods, Locations, Chemicals, A-Z Index, A-Z Disasters, For Teachers, What's New, Site Map, and Español. A search bar is located on the right. The main content area features a 3D landscape of the US Southwest with various environmental features. Below the landscape is a grid of buttons for different locations: Abandoned Mines, Dust Storms, Oil and Gas Fields, Uranium Tailings, and SW Locations. At the bottom of the grid are buttons for different chemicals: Arsenic, Lead, Mercury, Pesticides, Radon, Sulfur Dioxide, and All Chemicals. On the right side, there is a sidebar titled 'Welcome to the Southwest' with introductory text and navigation options: en español, City, Farm, Town, Border, Port, and SWest. A 'Sound' icon is also present at the bottom of the sidebar.

**For more information, contact:**  
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[toxtown.nlm.nih.gov](http://toxtown.nlm.nih.gov)





## Where exactly is the US Southwest?

The US Southwest is a region defined in different ways by different sources, but the “Four Corners” states (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah) are considered to be its core. Broader definitions include nearly a quarter of the United States, adding California, Nevada and Oklahoma.

### Answers to some questions...

#### What are uranium tailings?

Uranium is a natural, radioactive element that is mined from the earth. It is extracted from ore by a process called milling. Uranium tailings are the radioactive, sand-like materials left over from uranium milling.

#### What is fracking?

Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is a process for extracting oil, natural gas, and geothermal energy. Water, sand, and chemicals are injected into deep underground rock formations such as shale rock. These fluids open or expand fractures in the rock formations, and the fractures release the oil or natural gas. There is concern that these fluids may leak into drinking water aquifers or spill onto the ground and contaminate surface water, groundwater, and drinking water aquifers.

#### Should I worry about drinking water from a rural private well?

Private water wells are not regulated by the EPA or, in most cases, by state laws. Water in private wells may contain parasites, viruses, and bacteria, as well as contamination from human activities such as nitrates, fertilizers, pesticides, industrial and household waste, and heavy metals from mining and construction. At some windmill water sites, people and livestock may use the same water sources.

#### More on the NLM partnership with Diné College...

Tox Town’s US Southwest neighborhood was developed in collaboration with Diné College ([www.dinecollege.edu](http://www.dinecollege.edu)), a tribal college for the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation includes much of the Four Corners area, extending into Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Diné has eight campuses on the reservation, in Arizona and New Mexico. The College is a member of the NLM Environmental Health Information Partnership (EnHIP) ([sis.nlm.nih.gov/outreach/enhip.html](http://sis.nlm.nih.gov/outreach/enhip.html)).

Diné College undertook the challenge of helping NLM create a scene for Tox Town that reflected their own community. This would make it easier for the students and others living on the reservation, as well as those living in the Southwest region, to learn more about environmental health concerns unique to this part of the country.

**toxtown.nlm.nih.gov**

Also available in Spanish

**toxtown.nlm.nih.gov/espanol**



Tox Town introduces students, educators, and the general public to environmental health risks encountered in everyday life. Other scenes include the City, Town, Port, Farm and the US Border Regions.

Tox Town is a project of the Specialized Information Services Division of the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.