

Toxic Dust From Great Salt Lake Affecting Disadvantaged Communities [VIDEO]

Dust exposure containing arsenic and other metals is highest among Latinos and Pacific Islanders.

July 12, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

Harmful wind-carried dust from the exposed bed of Great Salt Lake is disproportionately impacting certain racial groups, including Latinos, according to [a study by University of Utah researchers](#). Currently, about 800 square miles of lakebed is exposed.

[Published in One Earth](#), the study analyzed data from the Utah Department of Environmental Quality's [air-quality monitoring network](#) to measure ultra-tiny particles coming off the dry lakebed, which contains arsenic and other metals, according to [Utah News Dispatch](#).

These particles can penetrate lung tissue and cause health issues, including [cardiovascular disease](#) and [asthma](#).

Researchers found that exposure was highest among Pacific Islanders and Latinos and lowest among white people compared with other racial groups. What's more, Salt Lake City's low-income neighborhoods are in the dust's path.

The study's authors noted that the more the lake levels decline, the more these populations will be impacted.

"People here in [Utah](#) are concerned about the lake for a variety of reasons—the ski industry, the brine shrimp, the migratory birds, recreation—and this study adds environmental justice and the equity implications of the drying lake to the conversation," said lead author Sara Grineski, PhD, a professor of sociology and environmental studies, in a news release.

To reduce disparities in harmful dust exposure, researchers suggest restoring the lake to a healthy water level, which would provide additional ecological and economic benefits.

“There is a really strong pattern of inequality with respect to race and ethnicity,” Grineski said. “It’s sort of a hopeful finding that if we can raise the lake to a ‘healthy’ level we can at least with respect to lake dust we can reduce some of that inequality.”

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