

Potential Health Risks at Former Smelter Area

Colorado Smelter Superfund Site

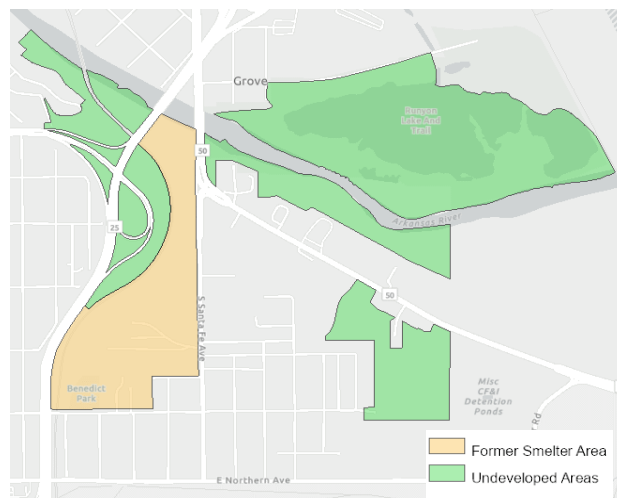
February 2025



Site Status

A smelter produced lead and silver in Pueblo nearly 100 years ago, this area is now the Colorado Smelter Superfund Site. The smelter left behind metals contamination in neighborhoods and nearby areas. EPA divided the Site into two areas: residential and commercial properties (Operable Unit 1, or OU1) and the former smelter area and undeveloped areas (Operable Unit 2, or OU2). This fact sheet focuses on Operable Unit 2.

- Operable Unit 2 includes the former smelter footprint and nearby undeveloped areas.
- EPA has been studying OU2 since 2019 to understand what kind of contamination may be present, where it is, and how it moves.
- EPA has sampled soil, sediment, surface water, groundwater, plants and animals (biota), and slag in OU2.
- Several unhoused camps have historically been located in OU2.



Map of Operable Unit 2

Contamination and Potential Health Risks

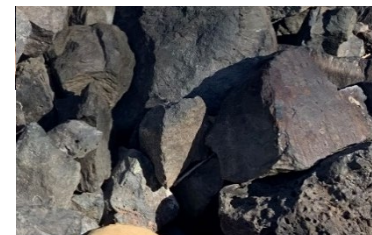
EPA is concerned about the health of those living in the former smelter area due to lead and arsenic contamination. Although EPA's studies in OU2 are not complete, preliminary data show high levels of lead and arsenic in the former smelter area.

- Slag is a waste product from smelting. There are several large piles and loose smaller pieces of slag in OU2.
- Slag in this area can look like large piles of black material or loose green, blue, black or glossy rock (see photos). Slag contains high levels of lead and arsenic.
- Soils and surface water in this area have also shown high levels of lead and arsenic contamination.
- EPA does not recommend people live in this area due to potential health concerns.
- People living in the former smelter area face risks mainly from direct contact with metals in the soil and water. This happens when people:
 - use creek water for bathing, cooking and cleaning
 - bury food or valuables
 - sleep on or near large slag waste piles

The best way to prevent potential health effects from lead and arsenic is to avoid contact with contaminated soil and water.



Glassy Slag



Broken Pieces of Slag



Large Slag Pile

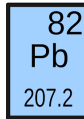
Health Effects of Lead and Arsenic

Lead and arsenic may pose a threat to human health.

Lead

Health effects may include:

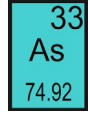
- Reduced learning, memory and attention
- negative impacts on the reproductive system,
- brain damage or lower IQ scores in children.



Arsenic

Health effects may include:

- cancer (skin, lung, bladder or liver)
- abnormal heart rate, and
- lower IQ scores in children.



Best Practices

People Working with Unhoused

- Bring your own water bottle with a lid and wipe it down before drinking.
- Wear closed toed shoes.
- Remove or wipe off shoes before entering home.
- Wash hands after leaving OU2. Wear a mask or face covering to help avoid breathing in contaminated soil.



Unhoused People

- Do not use the creek water for drinking, cooking or bathing.
- Wash hands with clean water, especially before eating. Avoid areas with more slag especially for sleeping, eating and food storage.
- If you have the means, consider wiping down food buried in soil or slag and wear a mask or face covering



Community Resources

Food and Housing

Pueblo Community Soup Kitchen **719-545-6540**

- Free breakfast, lunch and clean water; Monday – Saturday 8:30am – 12:00pm

Pueblo Resuce Mission **719-924-8413**

- Free dinner and emergency shelter; Mon – Sun 4:30pm (meals), 9:00pm (shelter)

Rocky Mountain SER **303-480-9395**

- Food pantry and empowerment

Posada **719-545-8776**

- Housing, food, and wellness for families with children, unaccompanied youth, and veterans

Center for Self Reliance **719-546-1271**

- Empower people with disabilities and wellness services

Information

EPA **303-312-6713**

- Information about EPA's work in OU2

Medical Care

Pueblo Health Department **719-583-4300**

- Free Blood Lead Testing

Pueblo Community Health Center **719-543-8711**

- Dental and medical health care and behavioral services. Prenatal care and wellness services

Health Solutions Crisis Living Room **719-545-2746**

- Family medicine, behavioral health services, recovery treatment, childcare; 24/7

Southern Colorado Harm Reduction **719-289-7149**

- Housing and wellness services

Project Apollo **719-470-0207**

- Health care services and essential aid

Colorado Health Network/Access Point **719-621-1105**

- Dental and medical health care and behavioral services