

Thresholds:

The Politics of Environmental Regulation and Exposure on the Navajo Nation

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This talk examines uranium contamination and its enduring legacies on the Navajo Nation and broader Diné homelands. I analyze how federal environmental standards—such as Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) as well as toxicological comparison values—produce uneven and often contradictory determinations of risk, exposure, and harm. Through ethnographic engagement with Diné communities downstream from the 1979 Church Rock uranium mill tailings spill, I trace how these regulatory frameworks render certain forms of chronic exposure simultaneously visible and dismissible, categorizing contaminated water as both “unsafe” and “safe” depending on shifting scientific criteria and limited datasets. By interrogating the epistemological and political limits of environmental regulation, this talk contributes to discussions about how risk is defined, by whom, and the challenges of remediation for Diné communities today.

*This presentation is the Medical Humanities & Bioethics Montgomery Lecture Series' fifth annual **Carlos Montezuma Native Health Lecture**, which is named in honor of the first Native American graduate of Northwestern University's medical school.*

In-person attendance is open to all in the Northwestern community: Searle Seminar Room in the Lurie Research Building (303 E Superior St, Chicago)

To attend via Zoom, please register: bioethics.northwestern.edu/events/

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