

Background

As part of an independent geologic study, wells in Mora County have been tested since 2023 to monitor water quality in areas in or near the 2022 Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon burn scar area. Results of testing in 2025, including three new surface water sites, showed an introduction or increase of ten metals. Three metals – antimony, arsenic and uranium - are above safe drinking water limits as established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The study also found elevated levels of manganese over EPA guidelines.

Recommendations

Boiling the water will not make it safe—it can actually increase the concentration of these metals. At higher concentrations or with long-term exposure, heavy metals can affect the kidneys, skin, cardiovascular system, and nervous system. Infants, young children, and pregnant women are most sensitive—especially to arsenic and manganese, which can affect brain development and long-term health.

Next Steps for Well Owners

- Test your well water at a [certified laboratory](#). If you have questions, contact the New Mexico Environment Department Drinking Water Bureau at drinking.water@env.nm.gov.
- Remember that boiling does not remove metals.
- The Department of Health is collaborating with the New Mexico Environment Department and the state Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) for further testing and long-term solutions for water treatment to eliminate potential harm. Disaster case managers from the DHSEM are available to connect Mora County residents to any recovery resources at (505) 670-4662.

Contact Us

New Mexico Department of Health Helpline: **1-833-SWNURSE** (1-833-796-8773) or [DOH-EHEB@doh.nm.gov](mailto:EHEB@doh.nm.gov)

Summary of Detected Metals, Health Limits, and Potential Health Effects

The information below describes what could happen if a person drank water at the detected concentrations for many years. These are long-term risks, not immediate health effects. Acute (short-term) effects are only expected at much higher concentrations.

Metal	Baseline Level (mg/L)*	Maximum Detected in 2025 (mg/L)	Health Limit (mg/L)	Potential Health Effects
Antimony	Not detected	0.026	0.006**	Acute (at higher levels): - Nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain Long-term: - Subtle changes in liver function or blood chemistry Most at risk: - Infants, children and pregnant women
Arsenic	0.0011	0.085	0.010**	Acute (at higher levels): - Stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea Long-term: - Hyperpigmentation and/or keratosis - Increased risk of certain cancers - Increased risk of cardiovascular disease Most at risk: - Infants, children, and pregnant women, especially with long-term use
Manganese	0.033	0.596	0.300***	Acute (at higher levels): - Metallic taste in mouth - Nausea - Confusion and psychosis at extremely high levels Long-term: - Brain and nervous system effects - Cognitive impairment in children Most at risk: - Infants, children, pregnant women, and people with liver disease
Uranium	0.0035	0.058	0.030**	Acute (at higher levels): - Abdominal pain Long-term: - Increased risk of kidney damage Most at risk: - People with kidney disease, pregnant women, and infants fed formula made with contaminated water

*Average groundwater well level in local public water system, pre-2022; **EPA Maximum Contaminant Level; ***EPA Lifetime Health Advisory