

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Overview of the Investigation of Drinking Water Exposures in Dennehotso, Ganado, Lower Greasewood, Red Mesa and Steamboat

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Public Health Concerns Related to Water Hauling on Navajo Nation

- Water hauling is widespread
 - ◆ ~14,000 households without potable water
- Use of unregulated, untreated source water
 - ◆ Mainly livestock wells and natural springs
 - ◆ Found to contain bacteria and chemicals (such as natural arsenic and uranium)
- Unsafe storage and handling



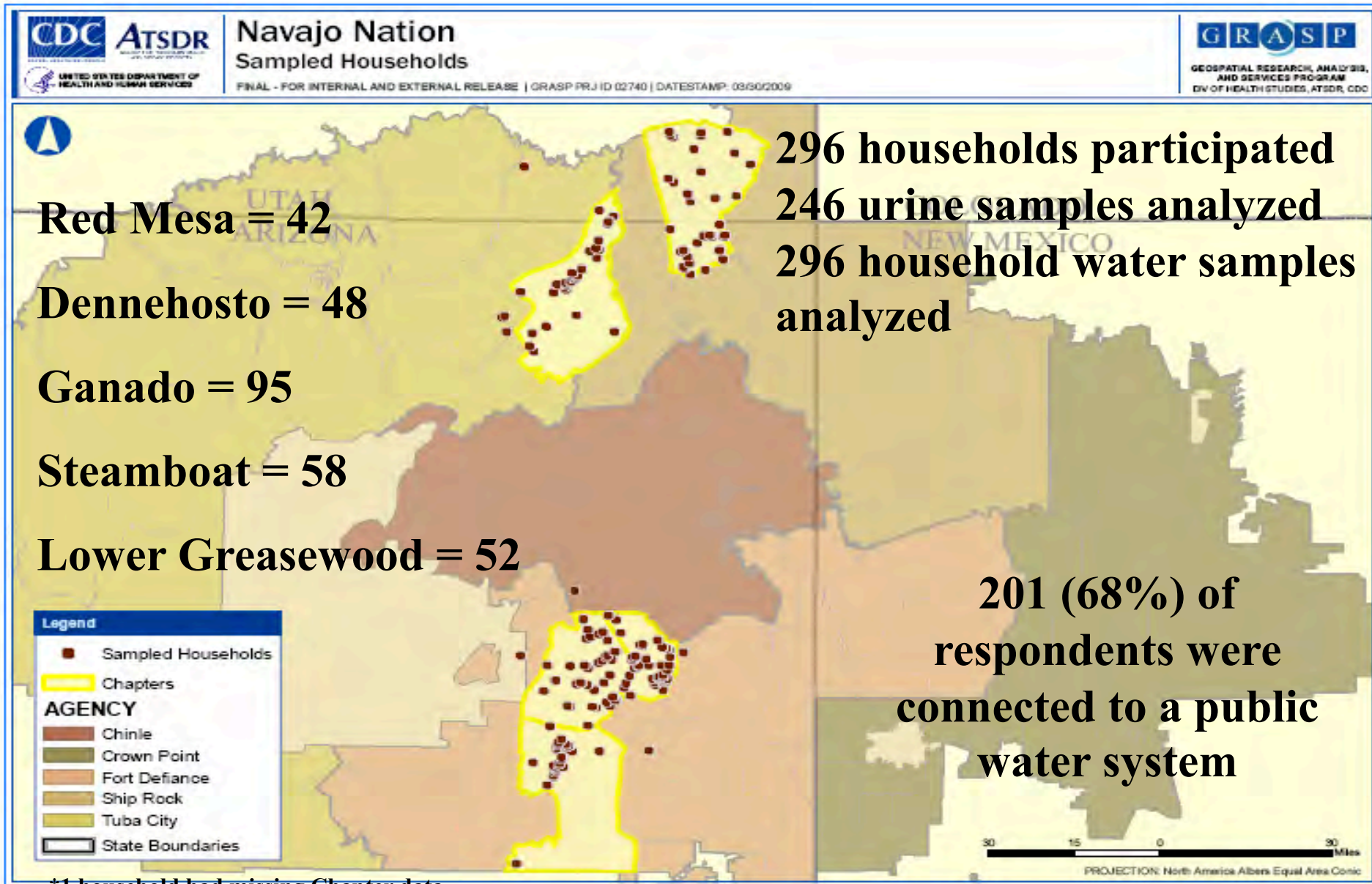
Household Investigation of Drinking Water Exposures- 2008

- Collaboration among CDC, Navajo EPA, Navajo Division of Health, Navajo Epidemiology Center, Navajo Veterinary Program, IHS
- Target 5 chapters based on source water survey findings
 - ◆ Red Mesa, Dennehotso, Steamboat, Lower Greasewood, Ganado
- Goals:
 - To what extent does contamination of unregulated water sources represent a public health threat?

Investigation Design and Data Collection

- Surveyed 296 households in 5 Chapters with and without access to public water
- Community health representatives (CHRs) visited homes and collected information from 1 adult per household:
 - ◆ Document water use, hauling and storage methods
 - ◆ Test urine for chemical exposures in people
 - ◆ Test drinking water in home for bacteria and chemicals
 - ◆ Identify additional water sources for further testing
 - ◆ Geographic location of home and water sources

Investigation Results



*1 household had missing Chapter data

How Common is Water Hauling?

- 65 (22%) haul some or all of drinking water
- 175 (59%) do not haul water
- 56 (19%) could not be confirmed



Bacterial Analysis

Total # tested for bacteria	Positive for <i>E. coli</i>	Positive for total coliforms
285	23(8%)	94(33%)

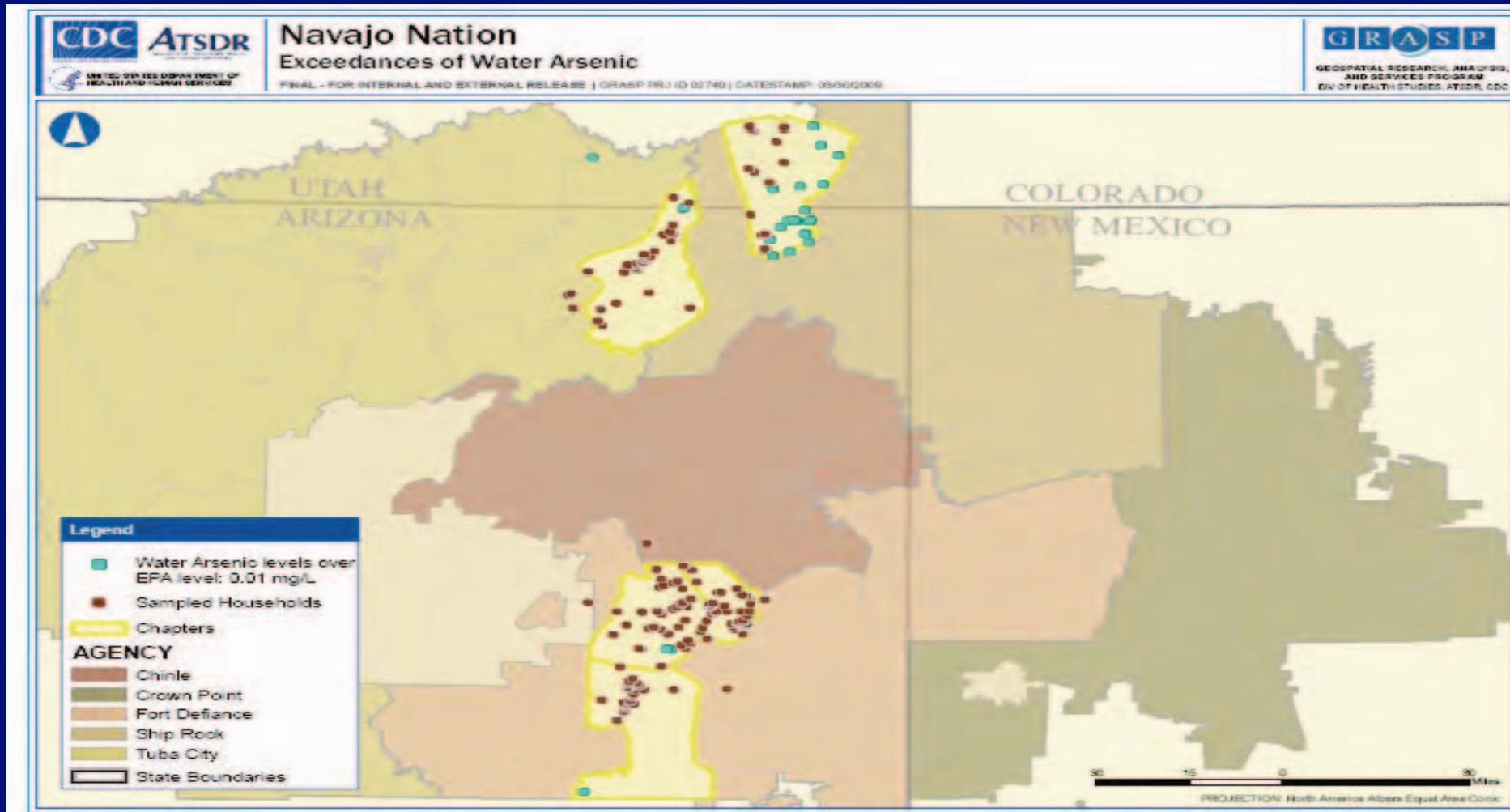
- A significantly higher proportion (73%) of hauled water samples had bacteria compared to non-hauled water samples (18%)

Water Nitrates and Arsenic

EPA Primary drinking water limit	N (%) samples above limit	Potential Health Effects associated with exposure
Nitrates > 1mg/L	42 (14%)	Blue Baby Syndrome: shortness of breath in infants < 6 months old
Arsenic \geq 10ug/L	33 (11%)	Skin changes, neuropathy, gastrointestinal illness, increased risk for lung, skin and bladder cancer

Geographic Distribution of Water Arsenic Levels

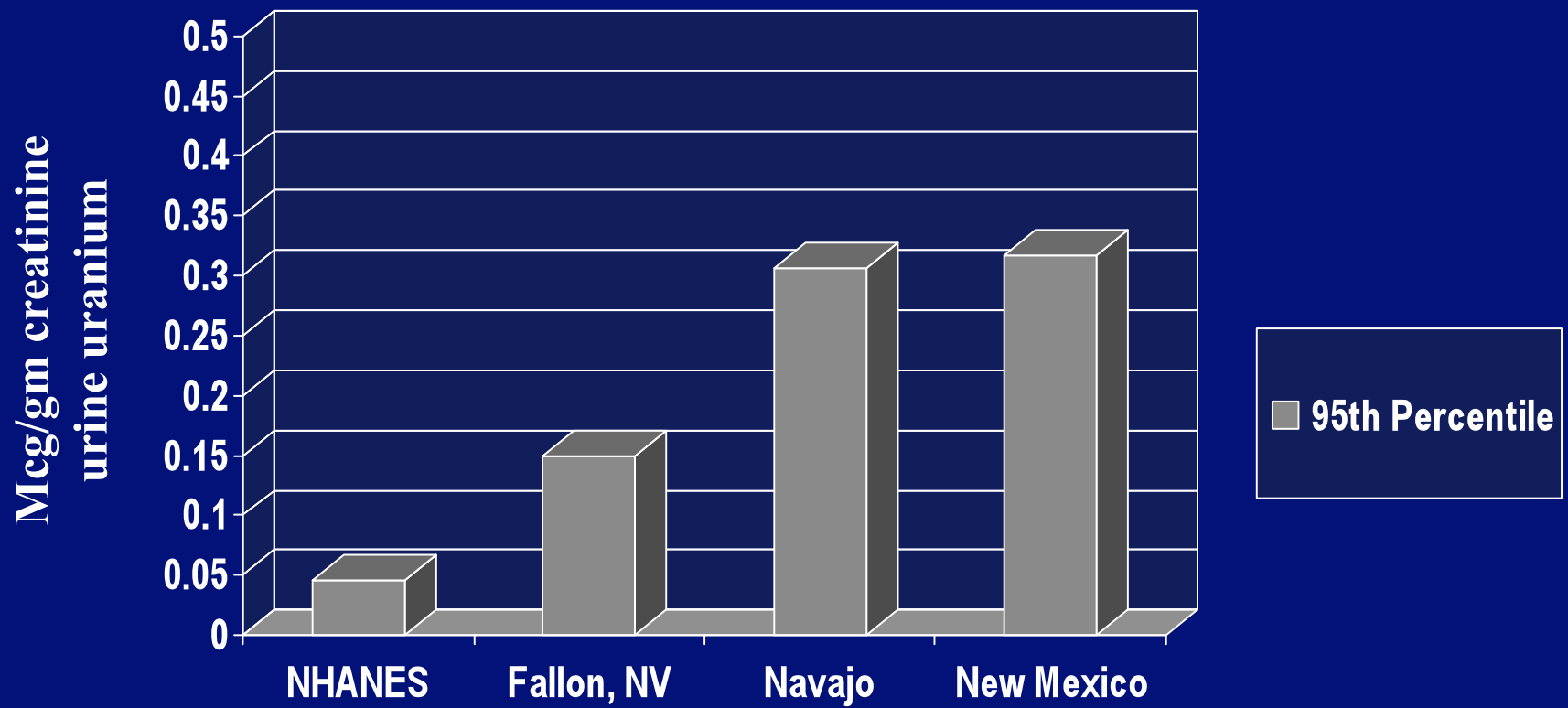
- 82% samples > Arsenic EPA limit were from Red Mesa



Human Exposures to Inorganic Chemicals (Urine Samples)

- Uranium =most frequent
 - ◆ Linking urine contaminant levels to direct health effects can be challenging
 - ◆ Compared levels to 95th percentiles of :
 - ★ NHANES
 - ★ New Mexico Biomonitoring Project
 - ★ Fallon Nevada Study
 - ◆ No values at levels known to cause human health effects

95th Percentile of Urine Uranium Levels

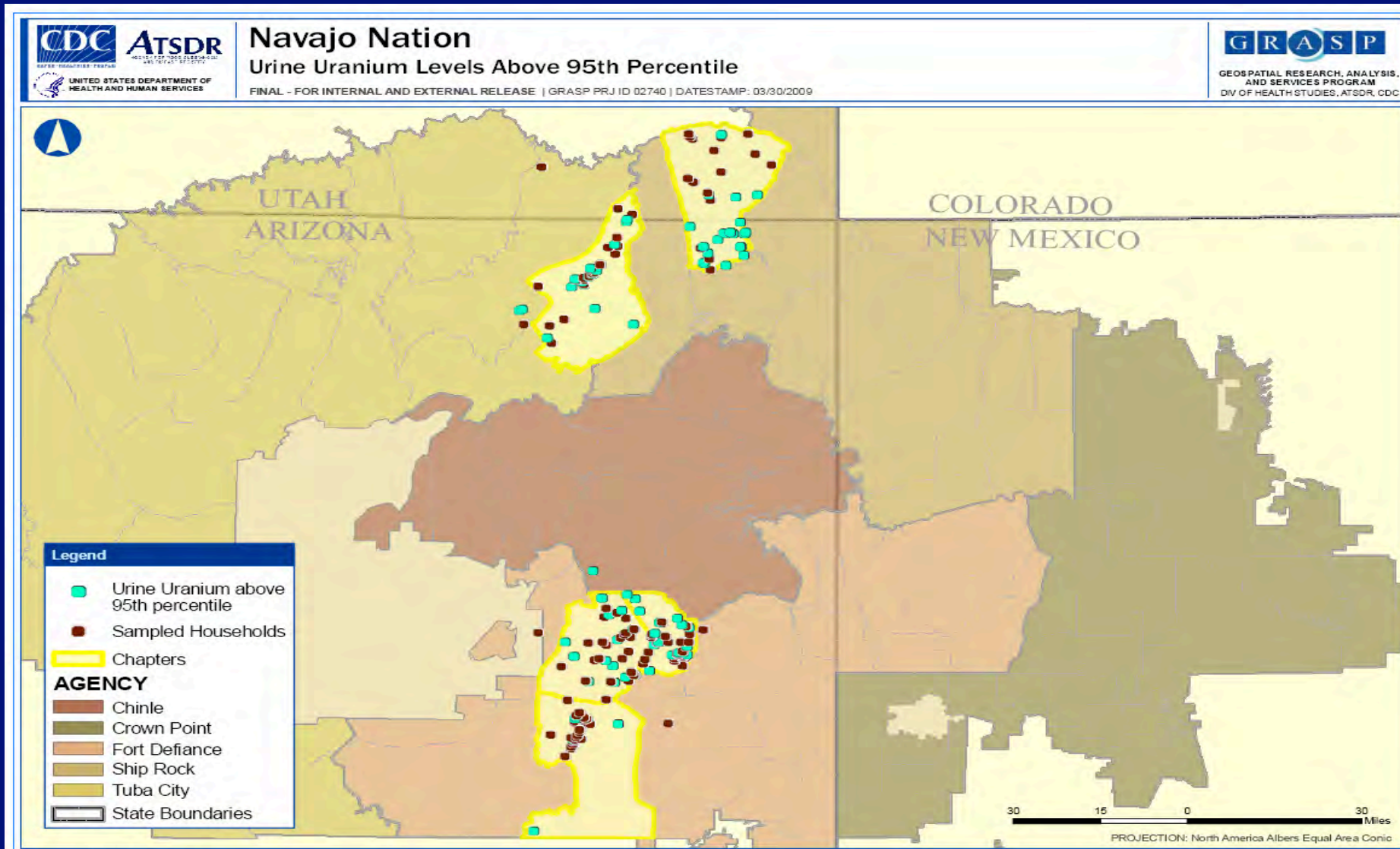




**Potential for
known health
effects**



Geographic Distribution of Urine Uranium Levels > NHANES 95%



MAP AUTHOR: S GRAHAM

Summary of Key Findings

- 22% of households haul water for drinking, including some with access to public water
- Those that haul water are more likely to be exposed to bacterial contaminants in drinking water
- Human exposure to uranium as measured in urine was:
 - ◆ Lower than levels known to cause health effects
 - ◆ Higher in this population than the general US population
 - ◆ Comparable to other Southwest populations
- Drinking water contamination does not appear to be the sole source of uranium or other chemical exposures in this population

What This Data Does Not Tell Us

- The source of uranium exposure
- The contribution of mining to uranium exposure
- The extent of historical exposure to uranium
- Health impact of uranium exposure

Current Activities: Disseminate Results and Follow up

Individual Level:

- Reporting individual results to participants
- Offer urine testing to other family members
- Offer enrollment into IHS Medical Monitoring Program

Community Level:

- Identify and test new sources of drinking water
- Physician Awareness
- Community Awareness

National Level:

- Congressional Meetings- Navajo 5-Year Plan

NEXT STEPS

- Continue to share results and work with other agencies (IHS, EPA, and Navajo agencies) to assist in guiding policy and interventions to improve access to safe water
- Clinical GI illness study
- Potential Congressional funding

THANK YOU!!!



Cadmium

- Not detected in household water samples
- 10% of urine samples were unusually high
- Arsenic, nitrates, cadmium, and uranium are the primary chemicals to be discussed