

Environmental illness communities in Arizona



There are many people with environmental illness (EI) who move to Arizona for the clean, dry air and the low pollen and mold. We tend to like to gather in loose communities, which makes life easier for all of us.

Keywords: Arizona, environmental, chemical sensitivity, electrical sensitivity, MCS, community, housing

The Arizona climate and vegetation

Arizona offers a variety of climates, from the hot desert town of Yuma at sea level to alpine forests such as Greer (elevation 8300 ft).

Southern Arizona is very hot in the summer and mild in the winter. In Northern Arizona, the climate is dominated by the mountains. At higher elevations, the summers are pleasant, but the winters cold. The western edge of the state is the beginning of the Mojave Desert, which is dryer than the rest of the state.

The dry desert climates mean that the temperatures change a lot over the day, especially during spring and fall, where in some areas it can change forty degrees Fahrenheit on a calm day.

The vegetation varies dramatically across the state, following the elevation and rainfalls. People who have problems with the vegetation in one area may do well in others. In the mountainous north, the vegetation can change dramatically within a few miles.

The communities

The EI communities known to this author are the following, in order of size:

- Tucson area
- Prescott area
- Snowflake
- Verde Valley
- Dolan Springs
- Kingman
- Rodeo/Portal

For some of these areas, contact persons are listed. Otherwise, ask around.

The Tucson area

There is a large community around Tucson, with perhaps two hundred EIs. There is an active MCS organization, which publishes a newsletter and regularly holds meetings and social events.

Some EIs live in town (elev. 2500 ft), while most are spread out over the surrounding communities, such as around Patagonia, Sonoita, and Benson, which are less polluted and at higher elevations so the summers are not quite as hot.

The vegetation varies, with cactus, mesquite, acacia and creosote common. In Oracle there are many oak trees.

Tucson has many health food stores, and there are a few doctors and many alternative practitioners who work with EIs.

If you are visiting, or are homeless, and need a place to camp during the winter, the area around Tucson is a good place to start. Recommended campgrounds are at Catalina State Park north of town, and the Gilbert Ray county campground next to Desert Botanical Gardens southwest of town.

Contact: www.HEALsoaz.org

To subscribe to the local newsletter, send \$12 to:
Heal of Southern Arizona
P.O. Box 36404
Tucson, AZ 85740-6404

Prescott area

Prescott was the first capital of Arizona and lies nestled in the mountains in the northern part of the state. It is surrounded on two sides by dense pine forests. The elevation is around 5500 ft, which creates temperate summers and cold winters.

The local community numbers about two hundred EIs, few of which actually live in Prescott itself. Most live near the surrounding towns, like Dewey, Paulden, Chino Valley, and Prescott Valley.

The local community does not have an organization and there are no community-wide events.

Prescott has a Whole Foods and another large health food store. There are many alternative health practitioners in town.

The area is plagued by smoke from forest fires every year. Rapid development is another problem.

When visiting the area, there are free individual campsites in the national forest behind Thumb Butte. Follow the road past Thumb Butte for half a mile, hang left when the dirt road forks and camp at the little rustic sites along the road. Restrooms are at the picnic area in front of the butte.

Verde Valley

Verde Valley is a bowl-shaped valley encompassing the towns of Sedona (elev. 4800 ft), Cottonwood (elev. 3300 ft) and many smaller villages. There are perhaps fifty EIs living in the valley, spread out over the whole area. There is no cohesive community, organization or events.

Sedona is a New Age center, with many alternative-minded health practitioners, but the town has become a playground for affluent people from Phoenix who are attracted by the area's natural beauty. This has created a building boom with extremely high real estate prices as a result.

The rest of the valley has also seen a lot of growth, but is still not as overrun as Sedona.

The town of Clarkdale in the southwest corner of the valley has some polluting industry, such as a cement factory and an asphalt plant, as well as a Superfund site.

The valley is every year plagued by smoke from forest fires.

There is a large Whole Foods health food store in Sedona, and also a smaller store there. In Cottonwood, there is the Mount Hope health food store.

The north campground in Dead Horse State Park is a good base for exploring this area. For remote primitive camping, go five miles east of Camp Verde on highway 260, then turn onto a Forest Service road and camp on one of the turnoffs along it.

Snowflake

The town of Snowflake was founded by two Mormons, Mr. Snow and Mr. Flake, and the town is still dominated by this faith today. The town is one of the neatest towns in Arizona, looking like a piece of New England with brick houses and flower gardens.

The EI community consists of about forty-five people, who all live east of town. There is a neighborhood of nearly twenty EI houses about eight miles east of town.

There is no official organization, but there is a socially active community. Most people get their organic vegetables from local grocery stores, while some get theirs by mail order. The nearest Whole Foods is in Flagstaff, about 100 miles away.

Snowflake is located at 5600 ft elevation, while the EI neighborhood is at 5900 ft. The summers are mild enough that most houses do not have air conditioning, while the temperature on winter nights often plummets to the teens, and occasionally near zero. There is little vegetation east of town, except patches of juniper in some areas. The desert starts about 15 miles north of the town. To the south, the elevations increase and pine forests start about 30 miles away. Forest fires in that area can sometimes send smoke up to the Snowflake area.

The best campgrounds in the area are at Lyman Lake State Park, south of St. Johns and Fool Hollow near Show Low. Someone may allow you to camp in their yard for a night or two.

Contact:

Susan Molloy (928) 536-4625

Dolan Springs

Dolan Springs is a remote village located 35 miles north of Kingman and 75 miles southeast of Las Vegas. It is at 3700 ft elevation in the dry Mojave Desert. Rainfall is scarce and the water table very deep, so there are basically no trees in the area. Vegetation is mostly yuccas, joshuas and creosote bushes. The area usually has less pollen than other parts of the state. The water table is 600-800 ft down and most people cannot afford the deep well themselves and instead opt to have a cistern and haul water from a community well. The town has a water system that serves outlying areas.

Due to an unusual electrical system (delta configuration), ground currents are very uncommon in this area.

The climate is hot and dry, with daytime temperatures staying above ninety degrees four months of the year, with no monsoon to cool it down. Winter nights are typically around freezing, with daytime temperatures around fifty.

The EI community consists of more than a dozen households, mostly in the valley north of town. Kingman to the south offers supermarkets with a good organic selection. Las Vegas can be reached in 60 minutes, and has everything.

The best place to camp near Dolan Springs is at the RV park in nearby Chloride. Their back lot is up on a hill and has no RV hookups, so it is usually deserted. The campground owners have had problems with EIs in the past, so be quiet.

For more remote camping, go to Gregg's Hideout or Pearce Ferry, which both have pit toilets. Primitive camping is possible in some areas with public (BLM) lands.

Kingman

There are a few EIs living in the valley north of Kingman. There is also a tight-knit community of Jehovah's Witness EIs living near US 93, north of town.

See Dolan Springs for other details on the area.

Rodeo (Portal)

The village of Rodeo is actually in New Mexico, about one mile from the Arizona state line. Located thirty miles north of the border to Mexico and in a very remote part of these two states, this may be the most isolated EI community.

Being so close to the border, there is a lot of illegal activity at night, including break-ins.

This community was started in 2002 and rapidly grew to six households, but then no new people moved in and the existing community slowly died out again. Until about 2012, the valley had no cell phone service, but now there is a tower on the north-east side that reaches almost all areas. No major power lines, no industry, no mining, and very little agriculture.

The elevation is about 4000 ft, while the surrounding ranges go to nearly 10,000 ft. The monsoon moderates the hot summers, but can also make the flat valley bottom a muddy hell. Winter days are mild, but winter nights frequently dip well below freezing. The spring sees a lot of high winds.

Portal, 15 miles away, is more upscale, with high real estate prices and the occasional yoga class.

The town of Douglas is about 30 miles to the south and has a Walmart, but presently no organics and no large building supply store. People in Rodeo travels to Bisbee or Silver City for their organic shopping, even though both towns are two hours away. A co-op delivers food monthly.

Other areas

There are EIs scattered all over Arizona in places that do not really have a community, including Phoenix (elev. 1000 ft), Yuma (elev. 130 ft) and Flagstaff (elev. 7000 ft).

Flagstaff is home to Northern Arizona University and is a liberal enclave in an otherwise very conservative state. It presently has three large health food stores and a mass transit system using hybrid-electric buses. The downsides are the high cost of housing, the harsh winters, the high EMF levels, and the smoke from forest fires.

For more information

For detailed articles about some of these communities, see www.eiwellspring.org/arizonalocal.html

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