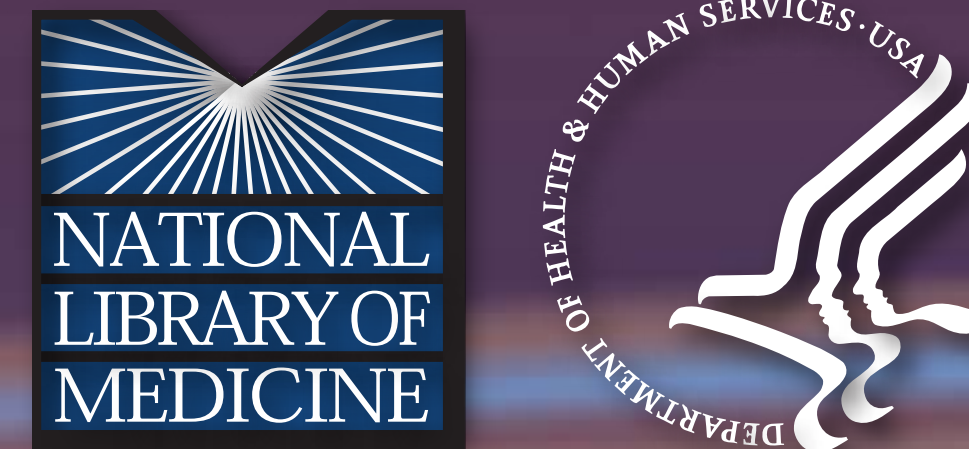


From Tox Town's Neighborhoods to a Virtual World: Representing Environmental Health Concerns in *Second Life*



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OBJECTIVE: The Tox Town Web site uses Flash-based graphics, animation, and sounds to represent imaginary neighborhoods illustrating information on everyday environmental health concerns, toxic chemicals, and hazardous substances for students and the public. The objective of this project is to explore the possibilities of representing the same information content in the virtual world Second Life.

METHODS: Second Life is growing in popularity as a virtual "place" for educational resources and activities such as simulations, games, multimedia information dissemination, and real-time lectures and conferences. Because Tox Town already has graphic features similar to what can be represented in Second Life, it was selected for this experiment in translating Web-based content into virtual world-based content. This project explores the opportunities and challenges in creating Tox Town in Second Life, including experimenting with new types of user experiences and interactive features that might be available. The project also considers issues of privacy, security, data integrity, collection of user statistics, accessibility, and other policy concerns as they may apply in Second Life.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS:

The National Library of Medicine (NLM) purchased an island in Second Life and contracted with a Second Life graphic design studio to create a community for avatars to explore. This proof-of-concept experiment demonstrates that it is possible to adapt and re-create a Web-based, flat, two-dimensional graphic resource in a three-dimensional virtual world. Each has its challenges and advantages in graphic representation of environmental health content, but adjustments can be made to allow access to the same quality information through either approach. NLM is one of the first Federal agencies to develop a presence in Second Life. Through the Federal Consortium for Virtual Worlds, NLM is working with other agencies to review the policy issues and usefulness of providing information in Second Life and other virtual worlds.



Virtual address in Second Life: **Virtual NLM (126, 171, 25)**