

## Managing Editor's Desk

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# The Meaning Behind the Upcoming New Look to the Journal

**S**tarting with the January-February issue of the *Journal of Environmental Health*, you will see the material in the *Journal* both organized and presented a different way. I will use my column this month to explain why we are making this change. More important than the explanation, however, is how we hope this change will impact you. We are making this change for two explicit reasons.

- We want the *Journal* to be more valuable to you.
- We also want you to see your career in environmental health as a story of advancing the science, the practice, and the practitioner. Let me explain.

My starting point is NEHA's mission. NEHA functions to "advance the environmental health and protection profession for the purpose of providing a healthful environment for all." There are several key concepts embedded in this statement.

First we aim to advance the science, the practice, and the practitioner of environmental health ... but as our board has insisted ... *for a reason*. What drives our important work is the passion we share for providing the public we serve with a safe and healthful environment. Safe and healthful environments, however, don't just materialize because we wish them to be! To get to this noble outcome, we have to develop our science, our practice, and our personal capabilities so that we can perform our jobs better and better, even as our challenges become more complicated and problematic. This realization takes us deeper into the meaning of our mission statement and brings us to the operative word within it, which is "advance."

It has long been the belief of the leadership of this organization that the pathway

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to our shared goal of achieving a healthful environment for all *necessarily* involves NEHA in the work of "advancing" the profession and its individual practitioners. We have also made the commitment to define advancement as a two-track undertaking. NEHA sponsors programs that aim to advance your education and understanding. We also imbue our programs with an enthusiasm and quality that aims to advance every NEHA member motivationally. We have also long believed that an educated and motivated workforce is key to making our dreams come true. If our profession lacks in either, our visions of increasingly healthful environments will slip that much further from our grasp.

In short, the central thread within our mission statement is this key concept of advancement. Moreover, as we try to help you advance both educationally and motivationally, we focus on the following three levels of professional consideration.

- Advancement of the science of EH.
- Advancement of the profession of environmental health.
- Advancement of the practitioner of environmental health.

Accordingly, you will find in virtually everything that NEHA does a connection to at least one of these levels. That's the basic framework that we operate from in all that we do.

Understanding this, let me now review how we will reorganize the material that we present in our *Journal*.

Like most professional societies, for over 70 years NEHA has followed the accepted traditions and conventions for labeling and presenting the material that we publish. Manuscripts are published as articles, opinion pieces are presented as commentaries, various short items are referred to as departments, and so forth. Accordingly, we have presented our table of contents as a collection of these various types of material.

Upon reflection, however, presenting the contents of our *Journal* in terms of an array of unconnected columns, departments, perspectives, articles, etc., tells you nothing about how this material contributes to the advancement of the science, the practice, and the practitioner of environmental health. In fact, such an organizational structure serves to actually obscure how any of the material that we are presenting in the *Journal* relates

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## Some Solutions

During the summer of 2008, I had the pleasure of serving on a workgroup to review and update the Guidelines for the Accreditation of Environmental Health Science & Protection Baccalaureate Programs. This review was organized and sponsored by the National Environmental Health Science & Protection Accreditation Council (EHAC) and the review group consisted of a mix of environmental health academics and practitioners. Several times during the workshop we were divided into smaller groups where we deliberated on a variety of issues. I participated in a group that had a very active discussion between practitioners and academics addressing the issue of writing competency of recently graduated, entry-level environmental health professionals. The practitioners, myself included, expressed the need to have workers capable of writing reports, including technical reports, which are well organized and use proper English and composition. They need to be able to write in a professional manner that will not embarrass their work organization. In addition to writing in a general manner to communicate thoughts and ideas, environmental health professionals also need to write in a manner that may be considered as specialized. They need to be able to write in a format to produce survey and inspection reports, technical reports, and scientific reports that convey technical information that informs the reader of problems, legal/statutory requirements, and recommended corrective actions that impact community health. These reports also may become legal

documents, thus accuracy of meaning and content is imperative. Generally, the practitioners felt that the entry-level workers lacked appropriate writing skills and had to be trained on the job.

I present the scenario above to illustrate an example of one way that we can correct this problem. By making our environmental health academic colleagues aware of this situation, they can influence their students' writing skills as part of their teaching programs. They also may be able to influence their institutions' English departments in a similar manner.

I do not intend to imply that I am the quintessential writer or an expert in English composition and grammar. I make plenty of mistakes. I do, however, recognize my weaknesses and take some steps to help minimize them. First, I do a thorough **proofread** of my work in which I am able to catch and correct most of the problems. Next, I conduct an informal **peer review** by asking friends and colleagues to review my work and provide feedback. It is amazing how often that I think I expressed an idea clearly, but another reader either thinks it says something different or does not understand it at all. Also, others can catch spelling errors that you are not able to see. When you read information that you write, you tend to read what you intended to write rather than what you actually wrote. This pertains both to misspellings and miscommunication.

Now, when you allow others to review your work like this, you have to be "thick-skinned" and able to accept criticism about your work. But, believe me, this is a valuable tool to help improve your communication. Usually, when you write for a publisher, e.g., a journal article, book chapter, etc., the

publishing process will include a peer review, editorial review, or both, which will help you present a high-quality product. I think that the initial draft that you submit should be high quality, however, and proofreading and informal peer review can help you achieve that quality.

Finally, I periodically refer to various **style writing manuals** to research and reacquaint myself with proper organizational formats and grammar. Several types of these guides are available, but most frequently I use *The Publication Manual of the APA (American Psychological Association)*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and the *CBE (Council of Biology Editors) Style Manual*.

## Conclusion

As environmental health professionals, our messages and recommendations are important because they can affect health and the quality of life. We therefore have an obligation to convey them accurately and properly. In order to communicate properly, we must be vigilant in the proper use of language and thus learn how to write properly. We need to say what we mean so that we mean what we say.

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Happy Holidays! I hope that the New Year brings everyone peace, good spirits, and prosperity. In 2010 let's approach our profession with renewed vigor and vitality. LEAN FORWARD! 🐻



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to any of these advancement considerations, which are the heart of our reason for being. We are now changing that!

We are now revamping the table of contents to actually show you which material falls into the advancing the science, the profession, and the practitioner segments of our program.

We're throwing away convention and doing away with an organizational scheme that presents our *Journal* material in terms of columns, departments, etc., that have little

meaning beyond the publishing world. Instead, we will now structure everything we print into one of three categories—each having to do with one of the levels of advancement. (We also have a fourth section of the *Journal* that presents material having to do with your association.)

By moving into this new organizational scheme, we will build awareness, every time you look through the *Journal's* table of contents, that NEHA is dedicated to your advancement on all three of these levels. In addition, we will make it much easier for you to pick the level

that you are most interested in and then go straight to the material presented for that level.

Our changes will also enable us to demonstrate that by virtue of what we are doing with the *Journal*, we support and honor our mission statement. As our quest to advance you on these three different levels become clearer, we believe that it will be easier to see the value of NEHA, and our *Journal*, to you. 🐻

