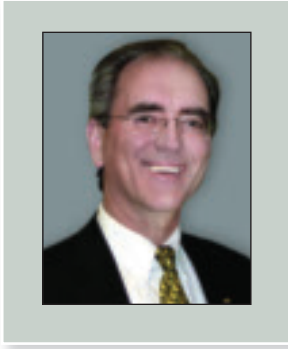


▶ MANAGING EDITOR'S DESK



Nelson Fabian, MS

Like you, I have days when I just shake my head.

Like this morning. I just read a commentary in the *New York Times* (January 9, "Invitation to Disaster" by Bob Herbert) that explores the ramifications of expected state deficits that total around \$360 billion over the next two fiscal years. It seems like just yesterday (FY 2008 to be exact) that the entire U.S. budget deficit equaled something like that (a little over \$400 billion). By the way, the FY 2009 federal budget deficit grew to an imagination-shattering \$1.4 trillion. Getting numbers that quantify the local debt in the nation is difficult, though I have heard of one estimate of around \$1.2 trillion.

These are eye-popping numbers to say the least. And since the public sector tends to lag in economic recovery compared to the private sector, it seems safe to say that the economic situation in the public sector isn't likely to improve anytime soon, green shoots or no green shoots.

There can be no denying that these huge deficits have taken a toll on public and environmental health and in particular the ability of our profession to remain proficient in its professional practice. My column this month will explain a unique measure that NEHA is taking in response to the massacre of continuing education (CE) budgets, which have been an almost universal casualty of the staggering deficits described above.

The ongoing and evolving proficiency of this profession is fundamental to the success of many of the priority health, environmental, and social programs that Americans hold dear. To name just three programs to illustrate my point, our proficiency is a prerequisite if health care reform, food safety, and

Introducing the New NEHA ROI AEC & Exhibition!

In 2010, it is no longer good enough to have a great educational program.

emergency preparedness are to be successful. We have vital roles to play in each, and if we aren't competent in our work, these programs will never become what they need to be.

One of the most effective ways to acquire the CE that we need is to attend a conference of the type that NEHA and virtually every other association sponsor. In fact, associations now stand as the number one source for adult CE in our country and our conferences are one of the principal means by which we deliver that education to you.

The state of the meetings industry today is not good, however. As if the budget constraints that compromise your ability to attend these rich educational events weren't enough, the very legitimacy of meetings has lately come into question. As I have written in the past, serious questions have arisen over the real value of a meeting since the AIG fiasco. In addition, today we are witnessing the emergence of an entirely new kind of meeting that can deliver a legitimate educational experience at a fraction of the cost of an in-person event, which of course is the virtual meeting. Some experts are even predicting that this explosion in webinars and teleconferences could reduce the demand for travel by as much as a whopping 10% in the upcoming year alone.

I would add that increasing numbers of associations (including NEHA) are evolving to a point of view where we value both in-person and virtual meetings. Nevertheless, the point behind this column is not to indulge in a discussion about meeting trends but rather to tell you about what NEHA is doing to make our in-person conference a much more valuable experience for you, even in these challenging financial times.

Change occurs all the time. We either adapt to change or we die. This basic principle of life extends to institutions as well. In this case, we can't pretend that the world of 2010 looks like the world of 2008, when we had such a successful annual meeting in Tucson. The world now is very different than it was in 2008—especially when it comes to meetings.

Even with our 2008 conference, we were already changing in major ways both to adapt to the different learning styles of younger professionals and to meet the cultural expectation that NEHA have greener and greener conferences. In both cases, I'm pleased that the changes we have made have kept NEHA in sync with the changing needs and expectations that you have. Our feedback surveys confirm that we are changing in ways you approve.

The new world of 2010, however, calls for yet more change as we look to bring you an in-person educational event that meets your needs, even in the midst of reduced CE funding and the perception that in-person meetings aren't as respectable or even as necessary as they used to be.

As a prelude to my punch line that will explain the essential change that we've made for our upcoming Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition in Albuquerque, let me

continued on page 50

Managing Editor's Desk*continued from page 58*

first note that NEHA has forever prided itself on its practicality. Yes, we explore some pretty esoteric issues at times and yes, we do devote some of the pages of this *Journal* to emerging research on various environmental health topics. We sometimes allow ourselves to pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

Yet NEHA has always prided itself on its practicality. We have consistently mined information and expertise for the real-world and practical education that we could then make available to you.

As we approach this year's annual conference, we have taken our crusade to provide you with "the real world and the practical" to a whole new level. Let me now get to the point of my column.

As the challenges to the meetings industry became clear, a novel and exciting response emerged within the industry. Though the numbers of associations that have jumped on board remain small in these early days, I'm proud to report that NEHA has enthusiastically jumped in.

Specifically, this new approach to meetings is most often characterized as the ROI movement (where ROI of course stands for return on investment). ROI-oriented education planners and committees work to develop educational programs that can deliver for the attendee a very real and documentable ROI.

We get it. In 2010, it is no longer good enough to have a great educational pro-

gram. The new expectation is for a conference program to feature the kind of education that enables an attendee to return to their workplace with the ability to more than pay for their trip through new cost-effective program improvements. In other words, we are now committed (even more than in the past) to providing our conference attendees with an educational experience that will both 1) advance the proficiency of the profession AND 2) enable the attendee to more than pay for their conference experience through the cost savings or revenue enhancements that they can implement back home on the job.

This is the first year that we have employed the principles of ROI conference building. Please know that we are designing major educational tracks within the Albuquerque AEC & Exhibition to feature this kind of education.

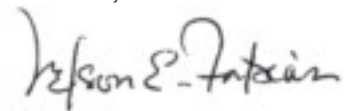
Studies show that in-person meetings can produce returns of up to \$12 for every \$1 spent. In this era of staggering budget deficits, what employer wouldn't want to see their financial performance improve by these orders of magnitude? On top of that, the attending personnel also have the opportunity to keep their skill set sharp, which is imperative in our fast-changing field.

We are determined to restore the good name to in-person meetings within our circle of influence. **NEHA also wants our annual conference to become known as the single**

best place for environmental health professionals to get a return on their investment for the education they acquire.

After the conference concludes and as a part of the new ROI framework, we will actually be measuring, for example, outcomes such as improved performance on the job, financial savings, or revenue enhancements that have been accomplished through expanded professional networks of colleagues as well as financial impacts resulting from the implementation of new products or technologies. As NEHA gets more deeply into ROI conference events, we want to be able to document—to you—the real financial value of our AEC & Exhibition!

Yes, your budget challenges are real. Yes, the acceptability of attending face-to-face meetings has been compromised thanks to the AIG effect and the emergence of virtual meetings. Know, however, that NEHA understands the very real nature of these challenges. Moreover, we will NOT try to deny or argue with these trends with some financially insensitive plea that it is your duty to attend professional conferences. What we will do is to search for ways to make what we offer transcend the challenges of our day. That is why we have moved deeply into the world of meetings ROI. We don't mind adapting and changing, if in the end that is how NEHA can be there for you. 🐼


LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor's Note: The article referenced in the following Letters to the Editor ("An Observational Study on the Effectiveness of Point-Of-Use Chlorination") originally appeared in the April 2009 issue of the Journal and is now available on the Members Only section of our Web site.

Lead in Adults

Dear Editor:

I'd like to commend Rebecca Berg for her "Inside the Profession" article about lead in adults (*JEH*, December 2009). Could you please review a detail that I work with routinely, i.e., OSHA worker protection standards? In her article, she states that "[OSHA regulations] call for medical removal from exposure at [a blood lead level of] ≥ 60 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$." I believe that the "medical removal" level for blood lead levels is 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, not 60 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$. (See osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=10644.)

Thank you and sincerely,
Harry Beaulieu, PhD, CIH, CSP
Boise, Idaho

JEH responds:

Dr. Beaulieu is quite correct with respect to OSHA lead standards for construction industries, and *JEH* thanks him for raising the point, as it provides an opportunity to clarify a rather murky aspect of the regulations.

continued on page 51