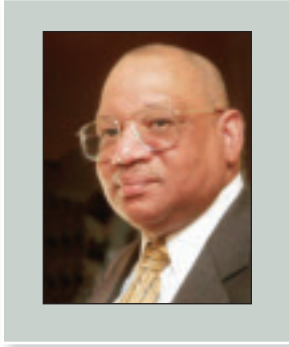


## ► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Welford C. Roberts  
PhD, RS, REHS, DAAS

## Introduction

As I write this column, I find it difficult to realize that I am already halfway through my term as president. Things are moving quite fast, and I am thinking about or acting on some item for NEHA daily. This is, in part, because our organization and profession is dynamic. We are involved with many issues that affect public and environmental health. These issues will influence how we practice our discipline both in the near term and into the future. NEHA's involvement in many public and environmental health issues and activities is reported in the E-News, on our Web site, and in this *Journal* to keep you informed and aware of the presence that our organization has nationally and locally. For example, NEHA is at the forefront of several current hot issues including health care reform, food safety, healthy housing, and control of the H1N1 influenza virus.

In the past I have heard or read commentary from some NEHA members wondering how or if we were engaging environmental health issues on a national level. In fact, at one time, I wondered the same and felt that NEHA needed a strong "Washington, DC, presence." As president, I am now able to have a broad and collective view of our association's involvement in national public and environmental health issues, and would like to share that view with you in this column. Also, I think that you deserve to be informed in this manner periodically so that you also can get a big-picture view of your organization's interests and influences nationally.

## NEHA's National Presence

*It is important for NEHA and our members to know the national perspectives and directions that our federal agencies are taking to influence and control environmental health concerns.*

### NEHA Is Represented

I have had the personal privilege of representing NEHA at a number of public venues starting in June 2009, just before assuming the presidency.

- On June 9, 2009, I attended Acting Surgeon General Galson's issuance of *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Healthy Homes* in Washington, DC. The call to action was to initiate a national dialogue about the importance of healthy homes and to look at the ways housing can affect health.
- Soon after I became NEHA president, on July 7, 2009, I attended a White House food safety announcement in Washington, DC. Vice President Biden, Secretary Sebelius (Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS]), and Secretary Vilsack (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA])

reported the results from the work of a Food Safety Working Group that was appointed by President Obama to advise him on how to enhance food safety in the United States. (By the way, this was my 25th wedding anniversary, so thanks to my wife for understanding my absence; we had a lovely celebration later in the day.)

- On November 20, 2009, I attended the White House briefing on public health benefits of clean energy reform, also in Washington, DC. A major theme of this forum was the interaction between public health and environmental programs at the federal level as represented by the presence and participation of key staff from DHHS and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA). The heads of both agencies, Secretary Sebelius and Administrator Jackson, respectively, started the forum by addressing the audience. This meeting specifically focused on three areas: health benefits of clean energy, health impacts of vehicular emissions and transportation, and healthy and resilient communities.
- On December 2 and 3, 2009, I attended an environmental public health think tank, which was convened by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Office of Chief of Public Health Practice and its National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH), Environmental Health Services Branch (EHSB). The purpose of this meeting was to identify and address potential areas of collaboration between PHAB and the environmental health/

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environmental public health community. It also addressed how the public health accreditation process also may include environmental public health programs with reference to the draft of *National Environmental Public Health Performance Standards*.

## NEHA's Support of Legislative and Other National Actions

I have approved the public expression of NEHA's support to some key legislative and other national efforts that impact the environmental and public health of our nation's communities. The following are some examples of these efforts.

- On June 30, 2009, I approved adding NEHA as an endorser to a letter that supports U.S. EPA adopting a standard (based upon a California standard) that assures that off-gassing from wood composite materials used in building construction be at minimal levels for formaldehyde. This national standard would promote green jobs and avoid future concerns, such as those raised about emergency housing units provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to those displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It would also level the economic playing field so that manufacturers who are willing to meet rigorous standards are not placed at a substantial competitive disadvantage.
- On July 30, 2009, I approved adding NEHA to a letter to **Speaker of the House Pelosi** thanking her and indicating support for her reintroduction of legislation to authorize CDC to fund and build an integrated health tracking national network. It would incorporate biomonitoring data capability into the national network and provide funding to local health departments (including EH programs) for surveillance and data collection of environmental exposure data in communities.
- On July 30, 2009, I approved adding NEHA to a letter to thank **Senator Hatch** for introducing an amendment to the health care reform legislation that funds CDC to provide fellowships for applied epidemiology and provide communities with funding for biomonitoring. Both actions support health and data tracking and collection.
- On October 16, 2009, a letter from NEHA with my signature was delivered to **Presi-**

**dent Obama**, which puts our association on record as favoring public health funding support as a part of the emerging health care reform legislation (see the January/February 2010 issue of *JEH*).

- On November 6, 2009, I agreed to have NEHA sign on to a letter supporting two bills by **Senator Reed**: the Healthy Housing Council Bill and the Research, Hazard Intervention, and the National Outreach for Healthier Homes Act.
- On December 12, 2009, I agreed to support a "Call to Action" from **Secretary Sebelius** (DHHS) to have NEHA sign on to an "open letter" to the American people to encourage them to get the H1N1 vaccine.

## NEHA's National Associations and Collaborations

As you know, environmental health is a multidisciplinary profession; therefore, it is practiced and applied throughout many sectors of our society. Thus, and not surprisingly, several federal agencies are involved with environmental health science and technology, guidelines and policy, and practice. NEHA collaborates with some of these agencies as demonstrated by the following examples.

We work with CDC's **National Center for Environmental Health** in the areas of environmental public health tracking, emergency response, climate change, drinking water, environmental public health standards, integrated pest management, environmental public health leadership, housing and healthy homes, manufactured structures, wastewater and groundwater, and the biology and control of insects and rodents. We also are involved with several federal agencies in the area of food safety, including CDC's **Division of Adolescent and School Health** and the USDA's **Food Safety Inspection Service** and its **Food and Nutrition Service**, the **Department of Homeland Security's National Center for Biomedical Research and Training**, and the **Food and Drug Administration's Office of Regulatory Affairs**. Our efforts with USDA also include a focus on emergency preparedness and terrorism response as it relates to food safety. NEHA works with U.S. EPA's **Office of Radon & Indoor Air (Indoor Environments Division)** in the areas of radon control, indoor air quality for homes and schools, and asthma concerns, and its **Office of Drinking Water** in the area of onsite wastewater treatment systems.

In addition to our associations with federal agencies, NEHA also interacts with several advocacy groups that address national environmental and public health issues. A few examples (and areas of focus) include the **Trust for America's Health** (climate change; public health aspects of health reform), the **Environmental Public Health Coalition** (to increase decision makers' understanding of environmental health), the **Clean Hands Coalition** (improve health and save lives through clean hands), the **National Association of County and City Health Officials** (state and local roles in the national food safety system), the **Council to Improve Foodborne Outbreak Response** (foodborne illness in the U.S.), and others.

## How Can NEHA Do So Much?

As you can see, NEHA is quite busy keeping an eye on and being involved with federal and national issues that impact public and environmental health. Given the vast number of agencies, associations that address national public and environmental health issues, and the number of issues, just how does NEHA identify and keep up with them? The answer to this question is actually a tribute to our association, its staff, the board of directors, and NEHA members. We have a wide range of surveillance opportunities that allow us to learn about relevant public and environmental health actions and activities at national, state, and local levels. Our executive director and the NEHA staff are constantly in contact with numerous public and environmental health organizations and agencies. This allows them to learn about and monitor issues that are relevant to our profession and NEHA members.

The members of our board of directors are dispersed geographically and they work in various public and environmental health sectors; therefore, NEHA benefits by having members of its governing body located close to where public and environmental health issues develop.

The technical section chairs and vice chairs are another source of knowledge for NEHA. They cover a broad range of public and environmental health subject areas: air/land, children's environmental health, drinking water quality/water pollution, emerging pathogens/vector control and zoonotic diseases, environmental health

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## NEHA NEWS

**Denise Devotta**

Originally from the tropical island of Singapore, I completed my BSc at the University of Toronto and my MSc at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. My graduate research focused on aquatic nutrient availability in Alaska. After completing my MSc, I worked for the Illinois State Water Survey on erosion

control and sedimentation issues concerning the Illinois River. I also spent a year teaching children and adults English in Shanghai, China. Just over a year ago, I was fortunate enough to join NEHA where I now work with NEHA's distinguished technical section chairs to develop the educational content of NEHA's Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition. Currently, I am working with the section chairs on the educational content of the 2010 AEC, integrating principles of return on investment (ROI) into some of the 2010 AEC & Exhibition education, and pushing the greening of the conference. In my free time I love to travel, try different ethnic foods, and be outdoors.

**Sarah Henry**

I am thrilled to be calling Denver, Colorado, home and delighted to have the opportunity to work with so many dedicated individuals for such an esteemed organization. I received my BA in psychology from the University of Toledo (Ohio). My interest in mental health and aging-related issues led me to pursue a master of public health administration degree from the Northwest Ohio Consortium for Public Health (University of Toledo and Bowling Green State University, Ohio). While completing my MPH, I worked for both the Susan G. Komen Foundation and the Alzheimer's Association (Northwest Ohio Chapters). After I completed my degree, I was hired by the National Association of Local Boards of Health (NALBOH) as project coordinator of education and training. My main focus was environmental health and emergency preparedness issues as they related to boards of health.

I was honored to accept the position of content editor of the *Journal of Environmental Health* and education delivery coordinator last May with NEHA. As content editor, my position primarily entails corresponding with authors and overseeing the layout of the *JEH*. The "education delivery" role involves determining the best methods to get information into the hands of practicing environmental health professionals. I enjoy utilizing my knowledge about the field in this position! 🐾

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leadership development, environmental health research, environmental health tracking and informatics, food safety and protection, general environmental health, hazardous materials and toxic substances, injury prevention/occupational health, institutions and schools environmental health, onsite wastewater systems, sustainability, and terrorism and all-hazards preparedness. They are in contact with professionals in the environmental health disciplines within their areas of responsibility and thus are able to learn about current developments and trends through such associations.

Our members, either directly or through their NEHA affiliate organizations, also alert NEHA to current issues in public and environmental health.

One of the major ways that NEHA keeps informed about public and environmen-

tal health issues and activities is through its governmental affairs program and its research and development program, both managed by NEHA staff members **Larry Marcum** and **Tom Dickey** with specific technical area assistance from **Vanessa DeArman** (food safety) and **Christl Tate** (onsite wastewater systems). They do a remarkable job learning about and keeping in touch with national public and environmental health issues that are important to NEHA, our members, and the profession. My discussion in this column is somewhat abbreviated and is intended to give you a sense of the scope of NEHA's involvement with public and environmental health issues on a national level. I encourage you to review the research and development and governmental affairs links on NEHA's Web site ([www.neha.org](http://www.neha.org)) for more depth and detail.

Again, I emphasize how important it is to be knowledgeable about current issues and trends in the environmental health

profession. It is a dynamic discipline that affects a large number of people in the U.S. Therefore, it is important for NEHA and our members to know the national perspectives and directions that our federal agencies are taking to influence and control environmental health concerns. In addition to the efforts that NEHA takes to keep informed, our organization has earned recognition as a key participant in the national environmental health scene, so agencies and organizations are asking us to partner with them on various issues and programs. NEHA's vigilance in this area is another example of how we endeavor to be at the forefront of public and environmental health so that we can help keep our members informed and prepared to LEAN FORWARD! 🐾