

President's Message

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A Fairy Tale – Or is it?

Once upon a time, in a place and time not far from here, thousands of dedicated, well-educated people worked diligently to make sure that their world was a safe and healthy place for all those who worked, lived, or played there. The efforts of these workers saved many lives, and made many people's lives better.

The workers felt that their deeds went unrecognized, and decided that they needed to have some publicity, because they thought that they had become "the invisible profession."

These workers would get together at annual conferences and bemoan the fact that they were "the invisible profession."

They decided that they needed to rectify this situation so that the public, their bosses, and, yes, even the politicians, would know who they were and what they did to make life better for those who lived, worked, or played in the parts of the country where they worked. They decided that they needed to have a public relations campaign to let the people know who they were and what they did to make people's lives better and safer.

As they sat down to start this public relations campaign, they realized that they all had different names. Their names varied depending on what part of the country they worked in, who employed them, and what sort of permit, license, registration, or other document that they possessed that named them as a professional.

They realized that a public relations campaign would not be very effective if they did not have a name that was universal for all those workers who toiled to make the country safer and healthier. They said, "This is like trying to sell a car without asking people to buy brand X or brand Y."

I'm not sure that we'll ever agree on one name for the professional, but I think that we need to move toward one nationwide credential to define the profession...

So they sat down and, after years and years of discussion, finally decided on what name they all wanted to be called. And they were then able to start an effective campaign to let the people know who they were and the wonderful work that they did to make the country a healthier and safer place for all the people.

Once they had decided on a common name, they realized that they weren't really the same in another important aspect. That aspect was the coursework, training, and examinations that they were required to have to work in this wonderful profession. Some had no requirements, some had very minimal requirements, and some had very difficult requirements to meet before they could work in this rewarding occupation. They also realized that because the requirements varied so much, people who worked in one place in the country could not get a job in another place in the country.

Fortunately, these dedicated workers had a professional association that could help them. This association had established a solid set of criteria for education, coursework, and an examination to work in this wonderful profes-

sion. It had even set up a system to track the additional training and knowledge that had been obtained by these professionals, so that they could keep abreast of the latest developments in this wonderful profession.

The dedicated workers lobbied in their individual areas of the country and lobbied their employers to discard the myriad of education, training, and examination requirements that had existed. They also lobbied to move to one countrywide standard for education, training, and examination that would lead to the credential provided by their professional association.

On top of all this, along came a movement called "accreditation." At first the dedicated workers were fearful of "accreditation." Soon, however, they realized that because they had a uniform credential throughout the country, which required the same education, training, and examination, a *de facto* standard existed for the profession throughout the country, and they did not have to worry about whether they would meet the "accreditation" standards for their profession.

And the dedicated workers were happy. They worked happily to make their country healthier and safer for the people, and they *all* lived happily ever after.

It would certainly be nice if this weren't a fairy tale.

I've been in this profession for over 40 years, and we still can't decide what to call ourselves. Several years ago, the NEHA board had a study conducted on what name was preferred, and the result was inconclusive! I'm not sure that we're ever going to agree on what to call ourselves, but, unless we can agree on a common name, it will be difficult to give much visibility to "the invisible profession."

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On the matter of a uniform credential across the country, I feel that this is becoming more and more likely. In the United Kingdom, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, their equivalent of NEHA, gives the exams, reviews the education and training, and then awards the credential, which is standard throughout the UK. We have no good reason why that couldn't be done here in the U.S.

The advantages of this are many. First, it may help to narrow down the list of names that we call our profession. Second, it would certainly raise the professional standard in those jurisdictions where there are no standards, or where the standards are lower than NEHA's. Third, it would create a nationwide definition of the profession. Fourth, it would make it easier for a professional to move from one jurisdiction to another. A staffing shortage exists in the profession throughout this country, but, in many cases, qualified individuals are discouraged from moving because the credential requirements vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Finally, it would make meeting upcoming accreditation standards much easier if credentialed staff all had the same credential.

Let me use my home state of California as an example. We have unique and very specific course requirements for college courses. Our accredited schools are different from the NEHA-accredited schools. At least, however, you can compare your coursework to that required in California to see whether or not it is likely that your coursework will qualify. If in doubt, you can send your transcript in for evaluation, accompanied by the appropriate fee, as to whether or not it meets the requirements. Our examination is given by a company that only gives the California exam, so there is no way one can come to work in California without taking the California exam. To top it off, you need to come to California to take the exam. I realize that California is not a typical example, but there are approximately 3,000 active, credentialed professionals working in California, which is probably the largest number to be found in any state. And, because the California exam is peculiar only to California, California-credentialed people either need to obtain another credential or go to a jurisdiction where no exam is required in order to work. It also effectively shuts out anyone who hasn't passed the California exam

and met the California course requirements from obtaining a California credential. One final note on the California credential: there is currently no requirement for continuing education. So it's hard to get the credential, but easy to keep it. All you have to do is pay the biennial renewal fee.

We need to remember that the purpose of a credential is not job security; it is to ensure that the public has qualified people working in the profession, protecting public health and safety.

I'm not sure that we'll ever agree on one name for the professional, but I think that we need to move toward one nationwide credential to define the profession and make it easier for the various jurisdictions to find credentialed candidates for their vacant jobs, and to make it easier for credentialed professionals to move to jobs throughout the country.

NEHA has the capability to provide that nationwide credential. I encourage you to work with your jurisdictions to accept the NEHA R.E.H.S./R.S. credential as one of the, if not *the*, credential for the profession. 🐾

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