

President's Message

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NEHA's Strategic Thinking and Why I'm Smiling in Spite of All the Reported "Doom & Gloom"

Even with wars, inflation, recession, surging oil prices, terrorism, and all the other things that could make a person pessimistic, NEHA is a source of good news and optimism.

We talk about environmental health as being the "invisible profession." Well, let me shed a little bit light on the NEHA part of the profession. One of the reasons that we're "invisible" is that we don't make much, if any, effort to tell others, and sometimes even ourselves, of the good things that are happening. We don't blow our own horn. So let me "blow our own horn" and tell you about the good things that are happening to NEHA, and why you should become a proud member of NEHA to help ensure that more good things happen to NEHA, and, consequently, to the environmental health profession.

Strategic Thinking—What Is It?

In order to put a little structure on this, which will help to keep me from rambling on, let's examine NEHA's Strategic Thinking and see how NEHA is doing strategically.

The concept of Strategic Thinking, as opposed to strategic planning, is a step in the positive direction. About five years ago, the NEHA board of directors decided that we needed a strategic plan. With some coaxing from our Executive Director Nelson Fabian and some of the board members, we jumped outside the usual box of strategic plans to Strategic Thinking.

Briefly (and that's a word I don't use too often!), the difference stems from the opportunistic business model that NEHA has adopted.

The key to making all these Strategic Directions work is thinking opportunistically.

A strategic plan says that we will do something specific by a specific date. Strategic Thinking says that these are the areas that we think are important, and whenever an opportunity comes up to pursue one of these Strategic Thoughts, we will.

That's enough of the philosophy behind Strategic Thinking. Let's see how Strategic Thinking has benefited NEHA, and why I'm so optimistic.

NEHA's Strategic Directions

NEHA's (your) strategic directions cover five areas. I'll discuss each of these areas and show how Strategic Thinking, as opposed to strategic planning, made a difference. I'll also "blow our horn" with some of the good things that are happening to NEHA.

Training and Education

This is one of NEHA's primary missions: to provide meaningful and useful training in environmental health to members and nonmember professionals in the environmental health field.

The economy, budgets, and the price of oil are things that are beyond NEHA's control. Old-school strategic planning might have come up with something like the following: "Increase attendance at our Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition by 5.437% per year for the next 3.826 years." That's a great goal, but it may be impossible to meet because of the things that are beyond our control. By focusing on new ways to impart training to environmental health professionals at the AEC & Exhibition in Tucson this June, and by having the conference at a resort location, we had the second largest hotel room pickup that we've ever had at our annual conference. (Just to see if anyone really reads this, kudos to anyone—who is not a member of the board of directors—who can tell me which AEC & Exhibition had the best room pickup.) As another quick aside, my fingers are getting tired, and I'm wasting space typing "environmental health" all the time, so I'm going to go to "EH." (No geezer jokes, either! Remember, my motto this year is: "Old Guys Rule!")

We've also developed online and CD training materials with NEHA e-Learning (formerly NEHA-CERT). Visit neha.org and click on e-Learning for more information. Note that courses completed online will automatically be added to your record for continuing education if you have a NEHA credential. This provides a means for individuals and offices to receive inexpensive training to maintain their credentials and update their skills.

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Through a grant with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, you can learn the latest about asthma triggers and indoor air quality issues in Washington, DC. The grant will pay for round-trip coach airfare, lodging, and a *per diem* allowance for meals. That means it's free!

NEHA Training also has excellent food safety training manuals at a very reasonable price. Another flash—hot off the press! NEHA Food Safety Training is now available online, to allow for easy access for everyone. Check out NEHATraining.org for more information.

Also, you can now tune into Radio NEHA and listen to, or download, discussions of topics of current interest. Visit neha.org for information.

On top of all that, links on NEHA.org can get you information on virtually any EH topic, and it will link you with affiliate Web sites, too.

There's more to come, educationally speaking! As they say, "Details at 11."

Credentialing

Again, this is one of our primary missions: to provide, update, and maintain a variety of credentials to help assure that the public is receiving EH services from qualified professionals.

NEHA has nine, count 'em, **nine** credentials, including the new Healthy Homes Specialist (HHS) credential. This is another case where the opportunity came up to provide this credential, and we filled the need. The exams for most of these credentials are available online at PSI/LaserGrade testing centers, which are located in every state and Canada.

Advocacy

This includes building relationships with governmental, business, and nongovernmental organizations to help promote EH. It also includes working to make "the invisible profession" more visible. It includes policy initiatives.

This is probably one of the biggest success stories in NEHA, but probably one of the least known. Through years of working behind the scenes, Larry Marcum, the NEHA manager of Governmental Affairs, and other NEHA staff have been working with governmental agencies too numerous to mention, building relationships so that when those agencies think of EH, they immediately think of NEHA. As I mentioned in my first column, the talk on

the street in government circles is: "If you want something talked about, go to organization X, but if you want something done, go to NEHA." That's the kind of reputation that takes years of hard work to obtain. We can walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

What this means is that when EH is being discussed, NEHA is at the table. It looks like the next big thing on the governmental horizon is going to be accreditation of EH and public health, and NEHA will be there at the table, since we are the only organization that exclusively represents the EH professional. We don't represent nurses, or health officers, or hospitals; we represent EH professionals only, exclusively, and very well.

Again, this is where Strategic Thinking, rather than a strategic plan, is critical. You never know who you'll run into at a meeting, in the hallway, or in the restroom who might be a useful contact. When the opportunity presents itself, NEHA has to be, and is, ready to take advantage of it.

NEHA's Organizational Capacity

This includes upgrading our computer systems to fully take advantage of e-commerce, building our reserves, and building staff capacity and capabilities.

This is the one area that we can control—for the most part. You never know when you will have a computer crash and how much it will cost to uncrash the system, but we can reasonably plan for and control these things.

These are issues that are hard to really see, but they make the member's interface with NEHA and the staff's workload a lot easier. Upgrading computer systems has been a major ongoing effort at NEHA for several years. It's expensive, but, in the long run, we all—members and staff, as well as nonmember EH professionals—benefit from this. It's also environmentally sound. The more e-commerce we can do, the less paper, ink, mailing (which entails fossil-fuel-burning transportation), and postage we have to pay for. You can now purchase online at the NEHA bookstore, register for an AEC & Exhibition, and contact staff via e-mail, rather than play phone tag. We now have e-news blasts to keep members up-to-date on the latest happenings. If we relied solely on the *Journal of Environmental Health* to get the news out, it could never be timely. For example, there is always a time lag of weeks between the time I submit my column and the time that I get my *Journal*.

You can now update your continuing education online. There is more to come.

We will be having a members section of the Web site. We have recently gotten an intranet for the board of directors to use. Now board documents can be easily stored and accessed electronically, saving paper, printing, space, and staff time.

Sustainability

This year the Sustainability Award was created and presented for the first time.

Congratulations to the city of Plano, Texas, for winning this award! Our Tucson AEC & Exhibition has really kicked it up a notch in terms of sustainability—from locally grown, organic food to cutting down on paper by putting the daily bulletin out in electronic form. Attendees were able to buy carbon offsets to mitigate the effects of their travel to Tucson.

The key to making all these Strategic Directions work is thinking opportunisticly. We're taking advantage of things on the run, so to speak. If it generally fits one of these Strategic Directions, we're looking at it to see how we can use it to better NEHA. There is now an Entrepreneurial Zone at NEHA. They take these opportunities, evaluate them, get them started, and turn them over to one of the regular programs in the office to move ahead with them.

These are exciting times all over, but, in many cases the excitement is rather negative, like a bank failing, but here at NEHA, the excitement is positive. Good things are happening.

I know that you're asking yourself, "What can I do first, to take advantage of this great positive force, and second, to help make this positive force even better." I've got a simple answer: *Join NEHA!* Encourage your colleagues to join NEHA! By joining, you get member discounts on the Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition (that's the AEC I've been referring to), discounts on NEHA credential renewal and exam fees, discounts on NEHA e-Learning courses, and discounts at the NEHA bookstore.

The more members that NEHA has, the more clout, juice, influence, call it what you will, that NEHA has when it sits down with governmental agencies, nongovernmental agencies, and businesses.

Finally, one of the characteristics of a professional is that they belong to their professional association, and NEHA is *the* professional association for the EH professional, period!

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Member News



Scrub Club Announced as Finalist for Platinum PR News Award

NSF International announced that the Scrub Club (www.scrubclub.org) is a finalist for the prestigious platinum award from PR News. PR News will announce the winners of the platinum PR Awards in October in New York City.

The Scrub Club is a fun, animated, and interactive Web site that teaches children the proper way to wash their hands. Each of the Scrub Club “soaper-heroes” represents one of the six steps in the hand washing process: “Hot Shot” and “Chill” combine to make warm water essential for proper hand washing, “Squeaks” turns into various forms of soap, “Taki” becomes a clock that counts down the required 20 seconds for proper hand washing, “Scruff” reminds kids to clean around their nails, “Tank” turns into a sink to rinse away the germs, and “P.T.” transforms into paper towels.

The free Web site includes activities for kids, educational materials (in French, Spanish and English) for teachers, and information for parents. Interactive games “Stop Fluin’ Around” and “Big E’s Grossest Hits” teach kids how to protect themselves from influenza and *E. coli*.

The cornerstone of the Web site is a “webisode” or cartoon featuring the Scrub Club as they join forces to fight off harmful germs and bacteria, teaching children the proper way to wash their hands along the way. The first webisode, “The Good, the BAC, and the Ugly,” finds the Scrub Club battling the loathsome but loveable character BAC (from the Partnership for Food Safety Education’s Fight BAC! public education campaign), and one of his partners in “grime” Sal Monella in a Wild West–themed adventure.

“Developing and supporting the Scrub Club has been a truly rewarding experience for NSF,” said William Fisher, vice president for NSF International. “We are honored to support a program so true to our mission—to improve and protect public health. And we couldn’t have done it without our partners.”

The Partnership for Food Safety Education (PFSE) has partnered with NSF International on the Scrub Club. The Partnership for

Food Safety Education is a nonprofit organization that unites industry associations, consumer and public health groups, and the U.S. government to educate the public about safe food handling and preparation.

The American Red Cross has also teamed up with NSF to teach children the importance of proper and consistent hand washing. The American Red Cross, a charitable organization—not a government agency—shelters, feeds, and counsels victims of disasters; provides nearly half of the nation’s blood supply; teaches lifesaving skills; and supports military members and their families.

The Scrub Club was designed with the help of Olson (www.oco.com), a Minneapolis-based advertising agency, to educate children on the importance of proper hand washing, while maintaining a fun and interactive platform for learning.

PR News’ Platinum PR Awards highlights outstanding communications initiatives and programs in the highly competitive and dynamic PR arena. The awards set the industry benchmark for excellence across all areas of PR. The Platinum PR Awards are open to all individuals and teams worldwide at for-profit and nonprofit organizations, including corporations, PR firms, public affairs and IR agencies, publicity firms, associations, government, NGO teams, and sole practitioners. Entries are judged by a blue-chip panel of corporate, agency, and academic executives, as well as by the staff of PR News based on creativity, innovation, sound planning, and implementation (www.prnewsonline.com/awards/platinumpr2008.html).

NSF International (www.nsf.org), an independent, nonprofit organization, helps protect consumers by certifying products and writing standards for food, water, and consumer goods. Founded in 1944, NSF is committed to protecting public health and safety worldwide. NSF is a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Food and Water Safety and Indoor Environment. Additional services include safety audits for the food and water industries, management systems registrations delivered through NSF International Strategic Registrations, organic certification provided by Quality Assurance International, and education through the NSF Center for Public Health Education. 🍌

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All this costs you only 26¢ per day, or 40¢ per workday. NEHA has the lowest dues of any professional association that I know of. My wife is a librarian, and librarians generally get paid less than EH professionals, and her national professional association dues are in the neighborhood of 2–3 times what NEHA dues are. NEHA really leverages your dues. Dues account for only 11.4% of the NEHA revenue. Professional associations typically receive around 50% of their revenue from dues.

So NEHA leverages your dues with funding from other sources, many of which are selling services to nonmembers, at a higher price. We leverage at almost a 9:1 ratio of nondues income:dues income. Think of it, if you join, NEHA will realize almost \$1,000 in income from your \$95 membership! Where else can you get a return on investment like that?

I’m not known for my Pollyanna outlook on life, but I’m bullish on NEHA, and I’m looking forward to this next year. 🍌

Dick Pantano

Address changes take approximately two months to become effective.

To ensure that you don’t miss a single issue of the Journal, please notify us as soon as possible of your new address.

Thanks!