Why do environmental health professionals strive to be Registered Environmental Health Specialists/Registered Sanitarians (REHS/RS)? Why do engineers want to be Professional Engineers (PE); dieticians want to be Registered Dieticians (RD); industrial hygienists want to be Certified Industrial Hygienists (CIH); and safety professionals want to be Certified Safety Professionals (CSP)? You can continue in this vein for numerous occupations in which a credential, certification, registration, or another designation allows the people on the street to know that you are a recognized expert in your profession. The credentialing process demands an extra measure of competence and dedication.

The original impetus behind the creation of NEHA was the desire by professionals of that day to establish a standard of excellence for this developing profession. This standard, which has come to be known as the REHS/RS credential, signifies that an environmental health professional has mastered a body of knowledge and has acquired sufficient experience to satisfactorily perform work responsibilities in the environmental health field. The pioneers of the association believed that such a credential was necessary if the environmental health field was to grow and take shape as a legitimate and widely respected profession. Furthermore in support of a credentialed profession, the American Academy of Sanitarians states that “the primary purpose of the Academy is to enhance professional recognition. Its aim is to improve environmental health within public health through certification.”

Would you want to drive across a mile-long bridge if you discovered it was built without a Professional Engineer (PE) designing and inspecting the building of the bridge? You would not go to a medical doctor unless you saw some indication that he or she had a medical degree. You feel confident you can trust these individuals to perform their jobs with integrity and professionalism.

An environmental health professional performs numerous job functions that have an impact on everyone’s health and lifestyle. Food inspections are one of the most common and most important duties performed by an environmental health professional. You would not eat at a restaurant if the inspection showed a low score based on roaches, low temperatures for hot foods, workers not washing their hands, or any of the other numerous items checked by that environmental health professional. Would you feel safer for your family if that environmental health professional had an REHS/RS after their name? I know I would because it indicates he or she has the education, skills, experience, and knowledge to conduct a very professional inspection of that restaurant.

Another important function of the environmental health professional is keeping our water safe. Waterborne diseases are endemic in many countries and pose a threat to millions of people every day. We are fortunate to have safe and well-inspected water supplies in the U.S. What separates many developed countries from undeveloped countries is the quality and safety of their air, food, and water.

Continued operation of a credentialing program increases coherence of the profession of environmental health and improves practice. These simple letters after your name indicate that you have reached the top of your profession and have shown you have the knowledge, skills, and experience to perform your job duties. A noncredentialed person does not have the same credibility.

How does being credentialed impact you as a professional with your employer, fellow employees, family, friends, and with the general public whom you serve? One impact is your ability to advance in your profession with your employer as they observe you working toward the REHS/RS designation, since registration is an indicator of your dedication to hard work, professionalism, and ethical practice. Your coworkers may be impacted in some way if you are an REHS/RS receiving promotions due to your REHS/RS designation.
and the infrastructure that supports vital environmental health services.

REHS/RS professionals are global in their work and dozens of foreign countries have credentialing requirements similar to NEHA’s requirements. Our Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition recently hosted the International Federation of Environmental Health’s (IFEH’s) biennial meeting. This organization is a federation of organizations that function in a similar manner to NEHA. IFEH member organizations represent dozens of different countries, languages, laws, rules, and regulations, but the common denominator for all of them is certification in the environmental health profession.

The state of Virginia recently decided to encourage their environmental health employees to obtain the REHS/RS credential by giving them a $1,500 cash bonus when they passed NEHA’s REHS/RS exam and a $1,000 cash bonus when they recertified every two years. This was in lieu of requiring an REHS/RS to work in Virginia as an environmental health state, county, or city employee. The commonwealth of Kentucky has a law requiring the REHS/RS credential after two years of working in the state as an environmental health professional. At least 15 other states require an REHS/RS to practice in their state. Eighteen states want you to have the credential but do not require it to work as an environmental health professional. Seventeen states have no credentialing requirements or have shown little interest in having their environmental health employees obtain the REHS/RS.

NEHA’s board of directors recently approved a policy position in support of the REHS/RS credential for environmental health professionals. This position is available for you to use and cite if faced with the issue of justifying that the REHS/RS credential is an important qualification for environmental health professionals. NEHA is strongly committed to a well-trained, educated, professional, and competent workforce and will be vocal in advocating these key workforce messages. You can read the policy position on page 62 as well as access it via NEHA’s Web site at www.neha.org/pdf/positions/REHS-RS-Credential.pdf.

One additional benefit of being registered is that it ensures that an REHS/RS receives regular continuing education to ensure that they are maintaining and enhancing their knowledge within the environmental health field. For the environmental health professional it is an opportunity to attend state, regional, or national conferences to engage and network with colleagues while keeping current with environmental health issues. Reaching out to a fellow environmental health professional is much easier when a face is put to the name.

In addition, you may make lifelong friends from attending these conferences. I am very proud to be a member of the REHS/RS group—a group of great people who work every day to make everyone’s life and environment safer and more enjoyable. Are you not a member of the REHS/RS group and want to become one? Go to www.neha.org/credential/REHS.html for a candidate information brochure, eligibility requirements, exam and application information, and NEHA resources to help you prepare for the exam.

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