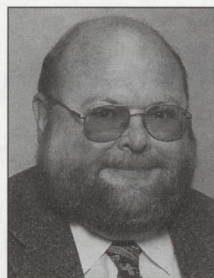


President's Message

James D. Dingman, M.S., R.E.H.S.



Happy New Year!!

Another year has slipped by, and here we are in 2003 already. It just seems like yesterday that throughout the world people were concerned with what would happen when the clock struck midnight on January 1, 2000. Would the computer systems that run our utilities, our businesses, and many other aspects of our lives be able to handle the Y2K conversion? Turns out there wasn't much of a problem after all—either in the United States or internationally.

Speaking of internationally ...

Last September, I was invited to be the guest of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) at its Annual Conference and Exhibition in Harrogate, England. It probably comes as no surprise to you that our colleagues from "across the pond" struggle with issues of the same types (and of the same accompanying political ramifications) we do. It was very enlightening for me to hear about some of these issues, and how environmental health members deal with them.

I had the opportunity to attend a reception to kick off a new CIEH venture. Called "twinning," the venture is of the kind in which CIEH enters into an agreement with a fledgling environmental health association in another country—such as Botswana. Under the agreement, CIEH will serve as a support organization and as a technical resource for the Botswana Environmental Health Association. It is a very impressive and necessary activity.

It also brought to mind, once again, an issue that the NEHA board of directors and I, personally, have struggled with: What should be NEHA's involvement in international activities? Should we continue our membership in the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH)? Should we look in another direction altogether? Or what?

I must confess, that for several years I was somewhat narrow-minded in my thinking

about the issue of international environmental health. While I know that environmental health problems and issues know few, if any geographic or political boundaries, my predominant focus was on what was in it for the membership of NEHA in general and, specifically, how NEHA could justify its membership in the IFEH given that the tangible "what's-in-it-for-me" benefits are few.

I had the opportunity of attending a meeting of the IFEH and NEHA leadership at the IFEH World Congress last June. Truth be told, I came away from that meeting with a whole new outlook on international environmental health in general and on IFEH specifically.

There are areas of international environmental health in which NEHA members can participate that will provide a direct and tangible benefit to them individually.

There are areas of international environmental health in which NEHA members can participate that will provide a direct and tangible benefit to them individually: NEHA members have the opportunity to attend the IFEH World Congress or possibly to participate in the governance of the federation as a delegate. One could even participate as a member of a Public Health International

work excursion to another country. Or one could participate in NEHA's Sabbatical Exchange Program with Canada or the United Kingdom.

Many of the benefits that NEHA members will reap from international activities are, however, of the intangible, "feel-good" kind: the kind of benefit derived from knowing that you have helped others to improve the overall quality of their environment—even though you may not have been personally involved.

As an example, you may remember hearing about the Tanzania technical-reference library project sponsored by IFEH. The goal of this project was to raise funds to support the building of an environmental health reference library for current and future environmental health professionals in Tanzania. Thanks to the generosity of environmental health professionals from around the globe, this venture was successful. NEHA participated in this program on behalf of you, the NEHA member.

Other international activities in which NEHA chooses to participate may result only in these same types of feel-good benefits—but in looking at the big picture, aren't benefits of that type worth it?

I believe that when we talk about NEHA's involvement in international activities, we must understand and accept the fact that the feel-good nature of such activities may well be the predominant answer to the question of "what's in it for me."

The board of directors is currently examining opportunities available in the international arena and will be deciding upon a course of action in the near future. I welcome any comments or suggestions that you may have concerning NEHA's activities in international environmental health.

Jim Dingman