

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Roy Kroeger, REHS

The Challenges Just Keep Coming

I want to start by saying Happy New Year to all my National Environmental Health Association family and friends. I hope all of you had festive good times with your loved ones. I know that I did. After all the holiday parties, dinners, drinks, and gatherings, the only social distancing occurring around me are the buttons on my shirt. I believe we all hope for a better year in 2022.

This month I am going a little off topic to talk about something we are all experiencing in our communities. The lack of a workforce and supply chain issues are not just environmental health or public health problems—the concerns are all around us. Some of our food service industry friends might be the hardest hit, but it is undoubtedly not limited to just them.

The last labor information I heard is that there are over 10 million advertised jobs in the country and only 8.5 million unemployed individuals. To me, 8.5 million seems like many people to fill jobs, but in reality, they are being very particular about what they are looking for in a position. Since workers are in high demand, they can be more selective on where they want to work and the type of that work.

According to *Forbes Magazine*, there are many different reasons people choose not to go back to work or be selective about what they want to do. The most noted reason for employees not to take a job is that the pay is too low. Wage growth is climbing at its fastest pace since the late 1970s and early 1980s, primarily because employers are trying to draw workers back in from the sidelines. The pandemic could also be keeping those who are worried about becoming sick from returning to work. Whatever the reason, job seekers appear to have leverage to determine when

Even though everyone is encountering these hardships right now, times will get better.

they will return and what they will do when they return. Many employees are insisting on higher pay and better benefits, while others want to work remotely. The Great Reassessment, as some call it, is changing the world in which we live.

I know you are saying to yourself, “Yeah, we hear you, but how is this related to environmental health?” I can’t think of a single day that the economy has not affected my environmental health program in the last several weeks. Let me start by saying that the world has not been kind to many of us in public health over the past 22 months. Everyone is already stressed, yet when we reach a turning point in the pandemic, we all know we will be asked to catch up on everything that fell behind.

Environmental health professionals are trying to get back into the field to inspect restaurants, swimming pools, and massage and body art facilities, yet we hear it all the time—why are you here? Many establishments are uncomfortable with nonemployees entering their facilities, some for real and some as an excuse. At other times, inspectors are returning to the office, saying the facility was not open. They have to determine if the facility has shuttered the doors for good

or closed because they have no staff to work. I have even heard rumors where an establishment demanded proof of vaccine before allowing an inspector on site.

I decided to talk about the economy this month because it is affecting my ability to hire new staff. Like the rest of the economy, I lost two staff that were able to find better paying positions. I always encourage people to improve their situation and I am happy for both, but I never dreamed that I would see so few people apply to replace them. In the past I would get dozens of qualified (at least on paper) candidates. Now I hear crickets from job seekers. I understand that public health has never offered the best paid positions. We do, however, have great careers and many of us love the work we do. I also believe that our work-life balance is second to none.

So why is it so difficult to find great new help? The pay in our office has climbed 10% this year alone, yet it does not seem to matter. Are there not enough people in the workforce with a science background? Are people not willing to enter environmental public health because of the political strife surrounding COVID-19? Is it because people do not want to go out in the public to work as we cannot inspect restaurants, swimming pools, day cares, and schools from home? At least, not yet. I need people who are willing to come to an office at least some of the time and spend time out in public.

I also mentioned supply chain issues at the beginning of my column. The lack of goods is changing our world as much as the lack of employees. I am sure all of you have witnessed bare shelves in the local grocery or discount stores. The same thing is occur-

ring in restaurants, day cares, and schools. I recently had planned on visiting a German restaurant in downtown Denver with my daughter. I was advised not to bother because they had very few items on their menu.

Our small wastewater program is also having significant problems due to the shortage of supplies. Locally, septic tanks are in short supply due to the difficulty in obtaining raw materials for the concrete, as well as the staffing to build them. I asked a local product representative if we allowed plastic tanks could

the company supply them, and he told me not to bother right now because tanks were taking months to get into stock. Perforated pipe is another issue; actually, all pipe is in a supply crisis. A contractor has asked me if he could drill his own holes in the pipe and another just did so without asking. Having expensive homes set all over the prairie waiting on septic systems is no better than all the vehicles sitting around with no computer chips.

I am sorry to start the new year off sounding like such a pessimist. Even though

everyone is encountering these hardships right now, times will get better. They always do. Like in the past, we will each find our new star employees and the shelves will once again be whole. Until then, hang in there. Deep down, all of us in environmental public health know that what we are doing is worth it. 🐼

Ray Knuge
 President@neha.org

Did You Know?

The NEHA Denver office has moved! While still located in the same building, we have moved from the 10th floor to the 1st floor. Our new address is 720 South Colorado Boulevard, Suite 105A, Denver, CO, 80246. More information about our new office will be shared in the NEHA News section of the March issue.

SUPPORT THE NEHA ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION

The NEHA Endowment Foundation was established to enable NEHA to do more for the environmental health profession than its annual budget might allow. Special projects and programs supported by the foundation will be carried out for the sole purpose of advancing the profession and its practitioners.

Individuals who have contributed to the foundation are listed below by club category. These listings are based on what people have actually donated to the foundation—not what they have pledged. Names will be published under the appropriate category for 1 year; additional contributions will move individuals to a different category in the following year(s). For each of the categories, there are a number of ways NEHA recognizes and thanks contributors to the foundation. If you are interested in contributing to the Endowment Foundation, please call NEHA at (303) 756-9090. You can also donate online at www.neha.org/donate.

Thank you.

DELEGATE CLUB

(\$1–\$99)

Name in the Journal for 1 year.

Oyetunde Adukanle
 Tunde M. Akinmoladun
 Mary A. Allen
 Steven K. Ault
 David Banaszynski
 Gina Bare
 Michael E. Bish
 Logan Blank
 Marnie Boardman
 Glenn W. Bryant
 Kimberley Carlton
 Deborah Carpenter
 James G. Cortelyou
 Lawrence Cyran
 Kristen Day
 Thomas P. Devlin
 Samantha Donahue
 Gery M. DuParc
 Wendy L. Fanaselle
 Anna Floyd
 Shelby Foerg
 Christopher J. Foster
 Mary K. Franks
 Debra Freeman
 Abdelrahim Gador
 Dolores Gough
 Brittany Grace
 Eric S. Hall
 Catherine Hefferin
 Scott E. Holmes

Jamison S. Honeycutt
 Maria Huanosta
 Douglas J. Irving
 Lamin Jadama
 Leila Judd
 Bonnie Koenig
 Adam Kramer
 Richard Lavin
 Philip Leger
 Allan R. Levesque
 Chanelle Lopez
 Ann M. Loree
 Stephanie Mach
 James C. Mack
 Patricia Mahoney
 Patrick J. Maloney
 Jason W. Marion
 Alan Masters
 Kaiser Milo
 Peter J. Mitchell
 Derek Monthei
 John A. Nakashima
 Brion A. Ockenfels
 Daniel B. Oerther
 Christopher B. Olson
 Joe Otterbein
 Alexis Parale
 Susan V. Parris
 Munira Peermohamed
 Frank Powell
 Jeffrey A. Priebe
 Mike K. Pyle
 Laura A. Rabb
 Jeremiah Ramos

Roger T. Reid
 Catherine Rockwell
 Luis O. Rodriguez
 Jonathan P. Rubingh
 Anthony Sawyer
 Philip H. Scharenbrock
 Marilou O. Scroggs
 Frank Semeraro
 Mario Seminaro
 Karla Shoup
 Christopher J. Smith
 Robert A. Stauffer
 Dillion Streuber
 M.L. Tanner
 Tamika Thompson
 Ralph Utter
 Kendra Vieira
 Phebe Wall
 James M. White
 Dawn Whiting
 Erika Woods

HONORARY MEMBERS CLUB

(\$100–\$499)

Letter from the NEHA president and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Eric Bradley
 Freda W. Bredy
 D. Gary Brown
 Kenneth C. Danielson
 Michele DiMaggio
 Tandra Dunams

Darryl J. Flaspaler
 Michael G. Halko
 Donna K. Heran
 Gwendolyn R. Johnson
 T. Stephen Jones
 Sharon L. Kline
 Sandra M. Long
 Robert A. Maglievaz
 John A. Marcello
 Wendell A. Moore
 Victoria A. Murray
 Priscilla Oliver
 James E. Pierce
 Larry A. Ramdin
 Matthew Reighter
 Joseph W. Russell
 Michéle Samarya-Timm
 Vickie Schleuning
 John H. Shrader
 Jill M. Shugart
 Joshua R. Skeggs
 Jacqueline Taylor
 Linda Van Houten
 Tom A. Vyles
 Sandra Whitehead
 Lisa Whitlock

21st CENTURY CLUB

(\$500–\$999)

Name submitted in drawing for a free 1-year NEHA membership and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Thomas J. Butts

Amer El-Ahraf
 Ned Therien

SUSTAINING MEMBERS CLUB

(\$1,000–\$2,499)

Name submitted in drawing for a free 2-year NEHA membership and name in the Journal for 1 year.

James J. Balsamo, Jr.
 Brian K. Collins
 George A. Morris
 Peter H. Sansone
 Walter P. Saraniecki
 Peter M. Schmitt
 James M. Speckhart

AFFILIATES CLUB

(\$2,500–\$4,999)

Name submitted in drawing for a free AEC registration and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Robert W. Custard
 David T. Dyjack
 Timothy N. Hatch
 Welford C. Roberts

EXECUTIVE CLUB AND ABOVE

(>\$5,000)

Special invitation to the AEC President's Reception and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Vincent J. Radke