

▶ PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Roy Kroeger, REHS

Environmental Health Marketing

I am days from my 28th anniversary working in environmental public health. Throughout my career I have heard that environmental health is unknown, underappreciated, and underfunded. I will not argue with any of these perceptions because I am right there with you in these discussions. Most professionals in this field understand that environmental health is where public health began nearly 200 years ago.

It has been shown repeatedly that core environmental health programs like air quality, water quality, food safety, and sanitation have nearly doubled life expectancy. Yet, most individuals in the U.S. do not know what environmental health is or the role it plays everyone's lives.

When talking to others about environmental health, I like to explain that it is working to ensure that the water we drink is safe, the food we eat is safe, and the air we breathe will not make us sick. Environmental health also provides protection against communicable diseases, vector issues, natural and manmade disasters, and mass gatherings. Though these programs have always been the core of environmental health, we are doing so much more.

So why is it when I say I work in environmental health, people think I clean the schools and hospitals or hug trees for a living? Where did we lose control of the messaging? How can people not know what we do or who we are when we play such a large part in their daily lives? We want to be recognized like firefighters and police officers. We want the public to love us like doctors and teachers.

Our world is hectic and almost everyone is trying to achieve the same recognition we

Can we improve recognition of our profession through marketing?

are. I have heard so many people say we are unsung heroes or label environmental health as the silent or invisible profession. Can we improve recognition of our profession through marketing? I believe that we can, but at what cost? How do we achieve this goal? Should we run ads on television explaining who we are? Do we have to have connections in Hollywood to make movies about environmental health or have an environmental health specialist save the planet? Actually, some of that has been done, but the hero was not called an environmental health professional.

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) has started several marketing initiatives to market both the association and the profession. Over the past several years, NEHA has been working to improve the exposure of environmental health to our policy makers. Most of us believe that a person who is appreciated will always do more than expected. Many of us want to feel appreciated for what we do.

NEHA Hill Day is one example of what the association is doing to gain recognition for the profession. The NEHA Board of Directors uses the Hill Day opportunity to discuss how environmental health protects the public and

the importance of federal funding for state, local, tribal, and territorial programs, as well as support for our federal partners. NEHA has also hired staff in Washington, DC, to have staff available to attend meetings with members of Congress, congressional staff, and agency leaders at a moment's notice.

In June, NEHA penned a letter to the White House encouraging the inclusion of environmental health in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Last month the White House announced that it would be redistributing \$7.4 billion from the American Rescue Plan to hire and train public health workers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also in June, NEHA hired a marketing firm to work on a rebranding effort for the association. The rebranding will involve more than a new look; the change will include improvements to the website, including how members access their accounts to reduce frustrations in accessing continuing education information, online training, and more.

NEHA has also created an animated video to expose the overlooked and undervalued work of environmental health professionals. The video shows some of the many ways an "invisible" environmental health professional impacts and protects many aspects of our daily lives. I encourage everyone to take a look at the video and then share it. NEHA is sharing the video in as many places as possible, but without members doing their part, it will sit on the website and not reach a larger audience. You can find the video at www.neha.org/eh-animated-video.

An additional item that has been discussed is the creation of a toolkit to help state and

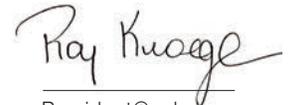
local environmental health programs get on the curriculum at junior high and high schools. A toolkit could help make students more aware of environmental health and be used as a recruitment tool to get students interested in pursuing a career in environmental health.

With everything NEHA has done or is doing, I still understand that environmental health professionals want to hear their elected officials reach out and say thank you. Unfortunately, this type of recognition

and appreciation will not come from actions at NEHA. Individuals who are proud of their profession, along with departments and state affiliates, must carry a large part of this responsibility. An idea could be as simple as a state affiliate hosting a legislative breakfast, not to lobby but to educate attendees on the benefits of a strong environmental health program. Professionals could also work with their governors to proclaim an environmental health day or week in conjunction with World Environ-

mental Health Day, which is observed on September 26.

As a gardener, one of my favorite quotes is: "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." We are at that crossroads now. We should have marketed our profession 20 years ago, but since we didn't, we need to do it now! 🌱



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Did You Know?

You can stay in the loop every day with NEHA's social media. Find NEHA on

- Facebook: www.facebook.com/NEHA.org
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/nehaorg>
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/national-environmental-health-association

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.

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David Banaszynski
Gina Bare
Jeffrey Barosy
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Marnie Boardman
Glenn W. Bryant
Kimberley Carlton
Deborah Carpenter
Kathy Cash
Lawrence Cyran
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HONORARY MEMBERS CLUB

(\$100–499)

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

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D. Gary Brown
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Darryl J. Flaspaler
Michael G. Halko
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Gwendolyn R. Johnson
T. Stephen Jones
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Sandra Long
Robert A. Maglievaz
John A. Marcello
Wendell A. Moore
Priscilla Oliver
James E. Pierce
Matthew Reighter
Joseph W. Russell
Michèle Samarya-Timm
Vickie Schleuning
John H. Shrader
Jill M. Shugart
Jacqueline Taylor
Sandra Whitehead

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
Leon F. Vinci

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.

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Brian K. Collins
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Walter P. Saraniecki
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James M. Speckhart

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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

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