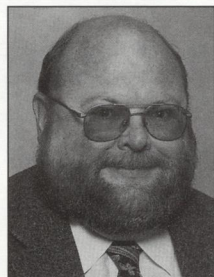


## President's Message

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



# Nonjoiners

**W**ith this column—Number 5 of 10—my literary responsibilities to the *Journal of Environmental Health* are now half completed. While that may not seem like such a big deal to most of you, I have really struggled with this responsibility! Let me tell you—coming up with an idea for a column every month is difficult. I could not imagine writing one on a daily basis. I guess that's why I am not a journalist!

The other day I was talking with a colleague of mine who happens to be a NEHA past president. I was lamenting the fact that another column deadline was fast approaching and that I had no idea what my column was going to be about. Like most past presidents, he was sympathetic with my dilemma, since he had "been there." And, like most good friends, he was full of suggestions. But he balked at the idea of being my ghostwriter! So, it looks as if I'm on my own—again.

In all fairness, my friend did come up with a good suggestion, which I decided to follow. He suggested that I take an informal poll of environmental health professionals, asking for their thoughts about NEHA.

So, while attending three recent professional conferences, I conducted an informal, unscientific survey of approximately 100 individuals. The survey consisted of three questions: 1) Are you a NEHA member? 2) If you are a member, what do you like most about NEHA? and 3) If you are not a NEHA member, why not?

Of those surveyed, 59 percent were members, and 41 percent were nonmembers.

All of the *members* surveyed stated that either educational opportunities (the Annual Educational Conference, the *Journal*, workshops, etc.) or opportunities to network with their peers were what they liked most about their membership in NEHA. In all honesty, such responses are pretty much what I expected. After all, these are some of the major service areas that NEHA provides for its members.

What really surprised me, however, were the responses I received from *nonmembers*. I fully expected to hear "It's too expensive" or "I was a member but dropped my membership because I did not get much out of it." Granted, there were a few responses of that kind, but not in the numbers I expected. Instead, the reasons cited for not being a NEHA member were all over the board. For example, some individuals were getting ready to retire, would not be active in the field after retirement, and "my boss won't pay for it or give any recognition if we are members." Others were only beginning their careers and were planning to join (I gave them membership information just to be sure), and still others simply didn't know why they were not members. Finally, a rather large number were just "not joiners."

**...this  
[nonjoiner]  
attitude toward  
joining  
a professional  
association is  
a reflection  
of today's  
professional  
culture.**

Of all of the responses, the ones that interested me the most were those of the "nonjoiners." I don't believe that environmental health professionals are that different from professionals in other career fields when it comes to joining their professional associa-

tion. I don't believe that the "nonjoiner" attitude is tied to financial status; nor do I believe it occurs because the association does not "meet their needs." I do believe, however, that this attitude toward joining a professional association is a reflection of today's professional culture. Some people simply are not joiners—period.

To illustrate this point, let's take, for example, the past NEHA AEC. One out of every five attendees was a nonmember who paid a higher registration fee than a member would have. Even though these conference participants could have become members and paid the member registration fee, they chose not to. What makes this phenomenon interesting is that the cost of becoming a member added to the cost of the member registration fee is still *lower* than the nonmember registration fee. One would think that, under this arrangement, a person would join, if for no other reason than for the cost savings alone. This simply is not the case. Some people would rather pay the higher costs!

So what does it all mean? Honestly, I don't know. For some reason, people may not want to be "associated" with a professional organization. Why? Your guess is as good as mine!

What does it mean for NEHA? Does it mean that NEHA will forgo its membership recruiting activities? No. Does it mean that we might have to approach these membership activities from a different perspective? Perhaps.

What it does mean is that NEHA cannot depend upon membership dues to provide the services that are expected by the membership. It means that NEHA must continue to seek revenue sources from outside the membership dues arena. ■

*Jim Dingman*