

▶ PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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The Happiest Profession on Earth

As I look back on the past year, words cannot express how grateful I am to be a part of this wild and wonderful environmental health field. Just like Henry David Thoreau said, “I am grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual.”

Over the past several years, environmental health professionals have been the unsung heroes of the COVID-19 pandemic. You have done as Abraham Lincoln said, “I do the very best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing so until the end.” In this holiday season, we all have much to celebrate regarding environmental health along with the success of the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA). I want to extend my personal thanks to environmental health professionals, NEHA partners, students, and NEHA staff, regional vice-presidents, and board members.

As I stated in a previous column, we all are thankful for the ability to meet in person once again. I have been fortunate enough to attend several conferences that have allowed me to meet my fellow environmental health professionals and to learn new information. No matter what stage of our careers we are at, all environmental health professionals have unique knowledge and experiences. Environmental health professionals love to learn from each other because we have a shared passion.

I am thankful to be a part of a dynamic and constantly evolving field. When I started in the field 30 years ago, indoor air quality, emergency response, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), nanomaterials, cyanobacteria (i.e., blue-green algae) blooms, and cli-

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mate change were barely a blip on the radar, if on our radar at all. Learning about these areas along with other emerging challenges keeps me excited, engaged, and entertained.

Over the past several months I had the pleasure to attend the Yankee Conference in New England, the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors National Conference, and the Jamaica Association of Public Health Inspectors Annual Educational Conference. Over the years I have learned that no matter where we hail from—even from a galaxy far, far away—we all speak the same environmental health language. Foundational principles of environmental health apply anywhere, irrespective of nuances in regulations.

Unlike many other professions, another magnificent aspect of our profession is the willingness and happiness to share information regarding similar challenges. In many professions, such as engineering, the free sharing of ideas is hindered by the fear of losing a competitive advantage. Environmental health professionals want to ensure people have a safe and healthy place in which to live, work, and play.

I am extremely grateful to have the privilege to teach this wild and wonderful environmental health field to future professionals. As Bob Phillips stated, “There are three stages of man: he believes in Santa Claus; he does not believe in Santa Claus; he is Santa Claus.” Even though I am the Santa Claus (I still believe) of the Environmental Health Science Department at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), my colleagues and the students help to keep me young at heart by educating me on new things. Today, students and early career professionals want a fulfilling career to help people and to make the world a better place. For younger individuals, environmental health checks off all of those career boxes along with many others.

As our EKU students say, the Environmental Health Science Department is the “happiest department on campus,” not quite up to Disneyland’s “The Happiest Place on Earth.” Another slogan for environmental health could be the “happiest profession on Earth.” Please volunteer to share the joy because all of the National Environmental Health Science and Protection Accreditation Council (EHAC) environmental health programs would love to have more environmental health professionals involved with and engaged in these programs. Let us all work to empower students for a bright future in a career with endless possibilities.

EHAC is the gold standard regarding environmental health science accreditation. EHAC requires a firm educational foundation in the natural sciences of biology, microbiology, chemistry, and physics. This

foundation—combined with a requirement for the completion of a practical, hands-on internship—results in graduates that are well prepared to immediately enter the environmental health workforce or to continue their academic journeys. Many environmental health professionals may not know that graduation from an EHAC-accredited program is required to enter U.S. Public Health Service, U.S. Army, and U.S. Navy environmental science and engineering careers. Graduates of EHAC-accredited programs meet the criteria to take the NEHA Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) credential examination after graduation. Please reach out to a program in your area. I know you will enjoy your time at your local college or university's "happiest department on campus" while sharing your experience about the "happiest profession on Earth."

If there are no EHAC-accredited program in your area, there are local colleges or uni-

versities that may be interested in starting an environmental health science program. Further, please reach out to the Association of Environmental Health Academic Programs (AEHAP). We need more environmental health science programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels both nationally and internationally. There are more jobs than graduates, which results in countless jobs being filled by those not possessing an environmental health science degree. Unlike many other fields, even if the number of environmental health science programs doubled or tripled and the number of graduates quadrupled or quintupled—which would be a wonderful thing—there would still be an abundance of jobs filled by those not possessing an environmental health science degree.

I want to provide a little background about an unsung organization in our field: AEHAP. In 1999, AEHAP volunteers and a small staff began working alongside EHAC volunteers to promote the value of environ-

mental health education and degrees. The goal was to launch more environmental health professionals into careers of significance for the care, health, and protection of our communities. From then to now, the goal remains to encourage more students to pursue a science-based degree in environmental health. AEHAP and EHAC would love to have more environmental health professional involved—the more the merrier.

Hopefully, we will be able to enjoy some well-deserved time off during these holidays. I wish all of you the very best, along with health and happiness throughout the coming year. A little more sparkle, a little less stress. As environmental health science rings in the New Year, I leave you with a quote from David Bowie: "I don't know where I'm going from here, but I promise it won't be boring." ❁

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Did You Know?

Membership provides environmental health professionals with connection, education, and advancement in their careers. Our nationally recognized credentials, extensive learning opportunities, and community of dedicated leaders position our members for greater professional success. We believe that the success of our members elevates the entire environmental health profession. We offer several different membership options: Professional, Emerging Professional, Retired Professional, International, and Life. Learn more about membership and its benefits at www.neha.org/membership.



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