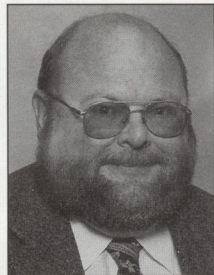


President's Message

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"The Field"

While these two words—"the field"—may not mean much to you, they will always hold special memories for me. Back in the days when I was a field sanitarian, I was required to "sign out" to show where I was going in case I needed to be reached. On occasion, several of my office colleagues and I would sign out to "the field." We would then rendezvous at a local café for a cup of coffee. Several times we contemplated opening a restaurant with that name. I guess maybe we were just trying to legitimize our coffee breaks! Ah yes, "The Field"—a place for weary sanitarians to kick back and reflect.

During these "field" trips, as we were systematically solving the world's problems, we frequently stopped and reflected on some of the most memorable moments in our environmental health careers. The stories that we could tell! I feel compelled to share some with you. Names have been omitted to protect the innocent!

A small family-owned grocery store in a small rural community had a customer base that included a large number of low-income patrons, including migrant workers and elderly people. This grocery store consistently sold whole chickens at a significantly lower price than any other grocery store in the town—much to the delight of its patrons. During an inspection, the sanitarian noticed a large tank in the meat walk-in filled with "water" and numerous whole chickens. Well, the "water" wasn't just water. It was a mixture of salt, baking soda, and water that was used to remove slime and odor from the chickens and to firm up the flesh. Turns out that this store was purchasing "distressed" chickens that were refused by the other grocery stores. They would soak these chickens in this solution, and then sell them as "fresh" chickens—at a real bargain price.

As you know, septic-system installers routinely dig a hole for the septic tank that is larger than the tank itself. The resulting gap is then backfilled upon completion of the system. One new sanitarian, while receiving training in septic-system inspections, decided that he could straddle this gap. Not only was he not able to straddle the gap, but as he was being helped out of the pit, he felt a draft. He had ripped the seam completely out of the seat of his new slacks, and he had to spend the rest of the day with his jacket tied around his waist.

At the conclusion of the inspection, the sanitarian returned to his car to find that his tire had been slashed.

While conducting a routine inspection at a local Oriental restaurant, a sanitarian entered the employee restroom. And yes, someone was using the facilities—but not for the intended purpose. Instead, they were washing their vegetables in the toilet bowl!

As part of their vector control programs, many health departments use sentinel chicken flocks to monitor for mosquito-borne diseases. The chickens are bled on a regular basis, and the blood is analyzed for various viruses. While one young sanitarian was

drawing blood from the wing of a chicken, the chicken suddenly flapped violently, causing the syringe and needle to go flying through the air. The syringe came down—needle first—and stuck in the sanitarian's chest. Luckily there was no significant injury, and both the chicken and the sanitarian survived.

While conducting a routine inspection at a small bar and grill, a sanitarian noticed that the only refrigerator in the kitchen was not working. All of the food inside the refrigerator was way out of temperature. It turned out that the refrigerator had not been working since the night before. The operator initially refused to voluntarily condemn the foods, but when faced with the alternative of embargo and testing, he reluctantly agreed. During the entire inspection, the employees and patrons of the bar were quite hostile to the sanitarian. At the conclusion of the inspection, the sanitarian returned to his car to find that his tire had been slashed. To make matters worse, someone at the bar had loosened the plug on the car's oil pan, causing the oil to slowly drain out. The sanitarian had driven about one block when white smoke billowed from his car, the engine seized up, and the car came to an abrupt halt. Unfortunately, it could not be proved that employees or patrons of the bar were responsible for these incidents.

I'm sure that each of you has fond memories of incidents you or your colleagues have experienced. Wouldn't it be nice if these memorable moments could be compiled into a book? What great reading! Maybe I'll write that book after I retire. Maybe I'll buy a café. But in the meantime, sit back and reflect on your favorite memorable moments. I'll see you ... in the field. 🐔

Jim Dingman