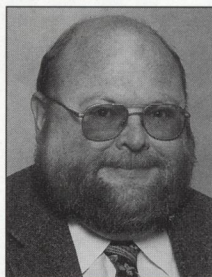


President's Message

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



A "Washington Presence"??

For many years, a portion of NEHA's membership has believed it is important for NEHA to have a "presence" in Washington, D.C.

Addressing this issue was, and still is, important to the NEHA Board of Directors. In 1996, in an attempt to better define the desired extent of such a presence, and to determine the extent of the activities the organization would undertake toward this goal, then-NEHA President Peter Thornton appointed a committee to "research the variables related to establishing a NEHA presence in Washington and (to) formulate a recommendation for the BOD."

The committee realized that our goals would be more appropriately described if we translated the "Washington-presence" concept into the concept of "a national presence." NEHA needs to do what is necessary to be recognized on a national level by the environmental health profession, and the general public, as the clear leader in the field of environmental health.

The committee also provided seven recommendations to the NEHA Board of Directors. I am pleased to write that NEHA is following through on these recommendations, and I want to pass reports on these activities along to the membership.

1. NEHA is continuing to be involved in national issues. In fact, our involvement has greatly increased over the past few years. The increase is due in large part to our work on federal grants and contracts. Federal agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) are now asking NEHA to participate in high-level federal committees such as U.S. EPA's Clear Skies Initiative and the DHHS Medical Reserve Corps Program. A national presence is further being demonstrated by NEHA's involvement in activities with CDC

in Atlanta. We are working with CDC in the areas of bioterrorism, safe food for schools, and epidemiology training.

2. NEHA is continuing to provide liaisons with numerous national agencies, both governmental and nongovernmental.
3. The committee recommended that NEHA not hire a lobbyist per se. Many legal and practical considerations surround this issue, and the current board of directors supports the committee's position.

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4. The committee recommended that NEHA's national involvement be reported to the membership on a regular basis. The board receives regular updates on these issues, and many of the regional vice presidents include some of the information in their newsletters. While this is a start, we think we can do a better job of providing the membership with this information. In fact, lack of information distribution may well be the reason that many members are still wondering what NEHA is involved in on a national level.
5. The goal of a national presence is an item that requires regular review and update. It

has been recommended that the issue be incorporated into NEHA's strategic plan. The board is currently involved in re-evaluating our strategic-thinking process (the strategic plan), and I assure you that the issue of a national presence is included.

6. To determine what issues our national-presence program should address, the committee provided four guidelines to follow: reason, cost, expectations, and alternatives. These are wise recommendations, and they have been followed during board discussions on applicable activities.
7. The committee recommended that the board of directors consider establishing a means of providing regular reviews and updates to the board and the membership on legislation and other national issues involving environmental health. I am pleased to report that this recommendation has also been acted upon.

At last year's Annual Educational Conference (AEC) in Minneapolis, members of the board of directors were approached by a NEHA member who lives in the Washington, D.C., area, with a proposal to assist with the "Washington presence." He proposed to contract with NEHA to attend and participate in meetings and other appropriate activities on behalf of NEHA in Washington, D.C. The board of directors was supportive of and approved the proposal pending the negotiation of an acceptable contract.

As you can see, NEHA is actively pursuing a "national presence." I believe that NEHA is moving forward at an excellent pace in obtaining the long-sought-after and essential national recognition that we deserve.

Jim Dingman