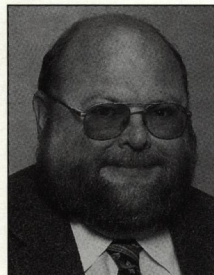


President's Message

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



"Way to Go, Joe!"

It is indeed a great honor and privilege to serve as the 68th President of our association. I am grateful to several of my colleagues who, early in my career, urged me to become active in NEHA and then to run for office. I am especially grateful to my wife, Cheryl, for her unwavering support and encouragement throughout my years of involvement with NEHA. The field of environmental health has been an excellent career for me.

The interesting thing is that I never intended to work in the environmental health profession. After receiving my master's degree in biological sciences, I accepted a job as an "environmentalist" with the Tri-County District Health Department in Colorado. I fully expected this to be short-term employment, until I could obtain employment in my chosen field—wildlife biology. Well, it's now 20 years later, and although I am employed in private industry instead of the public environmental health sector, I am now, and always will be, an environmental health specialist. Funny how the best-laid plans....

As I began thinking about what I should write for this column, I glanced at my bookshelf and decided to thumb through back issues of the *Journal of Environmental Health*. If you haven't done this in a while, I suggest you do so. It was really an eye-opener for me to see how far NEHA and the environmental health profession have come over the past 20 years. In one of those past issues of the *Journal*, I saw an article that intrigued me. It was about the environmental health professional, and I began thinking about the environmental health professional of today.

Now that we have entered the 21st century, what do environmental health professionals have to contend with? As an answer to this question, let's analyze what environmen-

tal health programs and activities are common for today's professional.

An environmental health professional must be computer literate. Computer knowledge and electronic communication are a basic tool for environmental health professionals. Personal computers are, without a doubt, the norm for communication, record keeping, and evaluation of environmental data.

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In addition to being regulators and educators, environmental health professionals must also be part scientist, part lawyer, and part public-relations expert. They must be able to understand people, and effectively relate to and interact with them. Communication skills must continually be updated and used to ensure that environmental programs receive the necessary community support and that the programs nurture a favorable and important relationship with the news media. Successful dealings with public-relations issues are a must.

As environmental technology continues to evolve and expand, environmental health

professionals must continue their formal education throughout their professional careers so that they are equipped to face and conquer the challenges of tomorrow.

Environmental health professionals routinely screen the ambient environment for pollutants that were unknown 15 years ago, using laboratory techniques that were also unknown 15 years ago.

Our profession is faced with a growing and shifting agenda that includes hazardous waste; toxic substances; solid waste; acid rain; water quality; resource recovery; and source reduction for industrial waste, as well as air, land, noise, and water pollution.

With the addition of chemical- and bioterrorism response, and the "traditional" environmental health programs, doesn't this list provide a pretty realistic analysis of the programs and activities today's environmental health professionals engage in?

The interesting point of this analysis is that, for the most part, these programs and activities were discussed in a President's Column in 1985—15 years ago—by then-NEHA president Joseph Walsh, Jr.

What will the environmental health professional need to contend with in 2017, 15 years from now? At the beginning of the 22nd century? I am confident that there are, and will be, environmental health professionals with the knowledge and insight to identify and address these future needs, much as Joe did 15 years ago.

If you want to read Joe's entire article on "The Now and Future Environmental Health Professional," it can be found in the *Journal of Environmental Health*, Volume 48, Number 2, from September/October 1985.

All I can add is ... way to go, Joe! 🐶

Jim Dingman