

NEHA NEWS

Ready for Launch: Private Water Network— A Community of People Working Towards Promoting Safety in Private Drinking Water

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The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) is pleased to announce the launch of the Private Water Network (PWN). PWN is a community of professionals and specialists working to protect the public's health from contaminants in private drinking water

sources. Over 15 million U.S. households rely on private water systems for drinking water. These systems include private wells, cisterns, water storage tanks, and trucked water. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) is responsible for making sure that the public water supply within the U.S. is safe. U.S. EPA does not, however, monitor or treat private wells and unregulated drinking water systems. Owners of private wells are responsible for ensuring that their water is safe from contaminants.

Prior to the launch of PWN, there was no go-to resource for peer learning and information exchange for environmental health professionals and water safety specialists who serve communities with private drinking water systems. Through a partnership between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NEHA, and National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI), PWN was established to fill that void.

CDC's National Center for Environmental Health has historically had programs, such as the Private Well Initiative and the Environmental Health Specialist Network, that focused on addressing public health threats to drinking water. There were two additional capacity building projects that funded states to address the data issues with unregulated drinking water systems. A private well community of practice with about 150 members was formed to share research updates, surveillance data, and practices on private water. Participants of this community of practice included state and local health departments, nongovernmental organizations, and universities. The outcome from these projects led to the creation of the Safe Water for Community Health (Safe WATCH) program that funds health departments to address problems with drinking water systems in their communities by strengthening and improving their programs.

Based on the feedback from participants of the Safe WATCH program, CDC felt the need to establish a peer-to-peer network with a focus on private water. The intention was to build a stakeholder driven network with water safety specialists and environmental public health professionals working on private drinking water systems to drive network-related interactions based on participant needs. PWN was established to serve two purposes: 1) to gather, organize, and share all existing and relevant resources regarding private water and 2) to build an online resource to support future stakeholder goals.



Attendees of the "Private Water Network: What Is It and How You Can Be a Part of It" session at the National Environmental Health Association's 2019 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition in Nashville, Tennessee. Photo courtesy of Reem Tariq.

Serving a membership of 6,500 environmental health professionals, NEHA was primed to build this resource. NNPHI was brought on to provide expertise on building a sustainable stakeholder driven network. NNPHI has a long track record of providing quality technical assistance in network building and online-community management. With CDC's and NNPHI's guidance, NEHA convened the participants of the Safe WATCH program to develop the mission of PWN. The mission of PWN is to "build a sustainable community for those working to support private water programs; to connect with their peers to share experiences, insights, and resources; to gain access to timely and relevant guidance for existing and emerging issues; and to build capacity to do the work more effectively and efficiently in order to protect the public's health from contaminants in private water sources."

PWN is a virtual community of practice with opportunities to interact face-to-face at NEHA's Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition (see photo above). Membership to PWN offers access to the virtual community platform that provides flexible communication options and easy-to-use knowledge management tools that facilitate collaboration and professional development. Features of the virtual community include a discussion forum, resources library, event calendar, member directory, and community-wide search option. Members of the network can engage on the virtual platform by uploading or downloading relevant materials, engaging in discussions, connecting with peers, and promoting relevant events. Furthermore, membership to PWN also offers access to exclusive webinars and newsletters on private water issues.

PWN's virtual platform is monitored by NEHA to provide a safe, secure, and productive virtual environment that is conducive for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing. PWN is a resource for anyone working to promote safety and public health in relation to private wells and unregulated drinking water systems.

NEHA is looking to include more members from the following agencies and organizations:

- state, local, tribal, and territorial governmental public health agencies;

- other state agency departments (e.g., environmental health, wells, permitting, natural resources, agriculture, health, ecology, land, water conservation, transportation, geology, building codes, permits, flood plains, emergency management);
- federal agencies (e.g., U.S. EPA, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Geological Survey, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, Army Corps of Engineers);
- national organizations (e.g., National Association of County and City Health Officials, Water Quality Association, NSF International, National Groundwater Association, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials);
- certified laboratories; and
- academic and extension partners.

Membership to PWN is free. If you are interested in joining, you can sign up at www.privatewaternet.org. NEHA membership is not required to be a member of the network; however, you will need to create a MyNEHA account through www.neha.org. Over the next year, NEHA will work toward maintaining a sustainable network growth and increasing member engagement for PWN. NEHA hopes to expand PWN membership to include a member from every state and territory within the U.S.

If you work with private drinking water systems, NEHA encourages you to join PWN today! For any questions or concerns about PWN membership or participation, please contact pwn@neha.org.

NEHA Staff Profiles

As part of tradition, NEHA features new staff members in the *Journal* around the time of their 1-year anniversary. These profiles give you an opportunity to get to know the NEHA staff better and to learn more about the great programs and activities going on in your association. This month we are pleased to introduce you to two NEHA staff members. Contact information for all NEHA staff can be found on page 42.



Renee Clark

I joined NEHA in January 2019 as an accounting manager in the Finance department. My goal is to streamline processes, become paperless wherever possible, and most importantly, help NEHA grow in all aspects of environmental health.

I have an accounting degree from Louisiana State University and started my career in the flood prone area of Houston, scheduling, transporting, and marketing natural gas. I've been through several hurricanes and other natural disasters and have seen firsthand how they affect the environment. My job moved me to Denver several

years ago where I continued to work in the natural gas industry. After a break from my career, I reentered the workforce for a non-profit association where I gained experience with associations, memberships, and continuing education programs.

I have three children: one in Nashville, the other in Denver, and the youngest in college in Idaho. My husband and I enjoy beautiful Colorado with our two dogs and following college sports.

I love seeing the commitment NEHA has to environmental health issues that we see in the news every day. It's exciting and meaningful to be a part of an organization that is trying to make a difference.



Rosie DeVito

My career in public health began while pursuing a degree in biology from Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York. I graduated in 2015 with a Bachelor of Science in biology and a minor in chemistry, and immediately went to graduate school for public health. I earned a Master of Public Health with a concentration in environmental health

in 2017 from the University at Buffalo in Buffalo, New York. Since then, I have had the opportunity to take on various roles in the environmental and public health fields, including conducting research on air quality, food access, and lead poisoning.

Upon moving to Denver in 2017, I took on a program management and community organizing role in active living and urban planning, as well as public health program instruction for high school students. Most recently, I worked as a data specialist that served as a placeholder until I found the perfect career that would challenge me, fulfill my passions, and allow me to grow as a leader in environmental health. My first year at NEHA has shown me that it is possible to find that career!

As a project manager, I oversee NEHA's projects related to hurricane recovery in enhancing the environmental health workforce, children's environmental health and emergency preparedness, and disaster-related disease surveillance and prevention. These projects are in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. I enjoy exploring the intersection of multiple different fields and this job allows me to do that! What I love most about this position is that I have the opportunity to meet talented professionals in environmental health and travel to unique places. Additionally, knowing that I am contributing to making a positive impact on people's lives motivates me to work hard.

When I am not at work, you will probably find me hiking, camping, or just spending time in the mountains. I also love going to concerts, festivals, and exploring something new every weekend. The only thing I seem to be missing in Denver is a dog! 🐾