

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Sandra Long, REHS, RS

Building Upon Our Role in Emergency Response

Happy New Year! Welcome to 2021. I would like to start the year by acknowledging the National Environmental Health Association members. Thank you for your continued membership. Membership numbers remained strong throughout 2020 at around 6,500. This number is a testament to your collective dedication to the field of environmental health.

Throughout 2020, as environmental health professions, we had been asked to perform duties outside of our comfort zones and have done so with grace and professionalism. We have functioned in an emergency response mode for much of the year. The realization of how essential the role of environmental health is in day-to-day life was greatly emphasized in 2020 in tasks such as ensuring testing sites were setup and functioning, enforcing orders from county judges and governors, and providing information to the public. It has been essential that we fulfill our roles every day as environmental health professionals.

As we move into a new year and a new phase of the pandemic, it is important that our role in emergency response is acknowledged. We need to use our momentum so that recognition is not lost. Legislation passed in June 2019, the Pandemic All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act of 2019, brings environmental health to the emergency preparedness and response table. It is up to us to make sure our roles are well-defined and understood.

Environmental health needs to actively be a part of emergency preparedness and response at all levels of government, as well as at all

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phases. As plans are written, it is important for environmental health to participate in defining its role in those plans. We need to define the capabilities, responsibilities, and function of environmental health for each situation outlined. We know how we can respond in a manner to best protect public health. For each situation, we are aware of our training, as well as the best practices for the situation. In writing emergency response plans, we can outline our responsibilities so that environmental health is placed where it needs to be to perform the essential functions of environmental health. It is equally important that our functions are not overlooked. We can assure that environmental health professionals will be involved in all areas necessary by participating in the planning process. Environmental health is part of a much broader picture and therefore, it is vital that all these areas are discussed in the planning phase.

In the implementation of emergency response plans, the role of environmental health should be further defined to provide clarity of our functions to all concerned. It is important that not only our coworkers and other departments or divisions understand our role but also the public. Without realizing it, the public is dependent of environmental health for many of the day-to-day functions during an emergency response: shelter assessments, safety of drinking water, waste removal, food safety inspections, vector control, public health communications, and disease surveillance.

The public thinks of emergency response in terms of police, fire, and medical personnel. No mention of environmental health. It reminds of a story I was told once about the various organs of the body arguing about which was the most important. The brain thought it was the most important because without it the person could not speak or have thoughts. The lungs thought they were the most important because without them the rest of the body would not have oxygen. The stomach thought it was the most important because without it the body would lack nutrition. It was the heart that quietly said because of my functioning all the rest of you can take care of your jobs.

Right now, while we have attention, is the time to put a light on the functions of environmental health and all areas of our involvement.

The public needs to be aware that environmental health is a key part of everyday functions, as well as emergency response. I would encourage each of you to bring atten-

tion to your accomplishments and functions. This endeavor should include utilization of all forms of social media to provide information on activities and programs, including congratulations or praise for the accomplishments of your environmental health departments. Continue to apply for state governor

and local city proclamations honoring environmental health with a day or week to bring attention to and recognition of all the work environmental health professionals have been performing. These simple actions alert and remind the public of the presence and necessity of environmental health.

In closing, please remember the words of Robin Williams: “No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.”



Sandra Long

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Did You Know?

The student and health department application periods are open for the 2021 National Environmental Public Health Internship Program (NEPHIP). NEPHIP exposes environmental health students to the important mission and work of public health departments, as well as presents them with career opportunities and encouragement to consider working at a public health department. NEPHIP provides public health departments with a qualified intern who is eager to gain field experience and contribute to departmental work. The deadline for student and health department applications is January 22. Learn more at www.neha.org/nephip.

SUPPORT THE NEHA ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION

The NEHA Endowment Foundation was established to enable NEHA to do more for the environmental health profession than its annual budget might allow. Special projects and programs supported by the foundation will be carried out for the sole purpose of advancing the profession and its practitioners.

Individuals who have contributed to the foundation are listed below by club category. These listings are based on what people have actually donated to the foundation—not what they have pledged. Names will be published under the appropriate category for 1 year; additional contributions will move individuals to a different category in the following year(s). For each of the categories, there are a number of ways NEHA recognizes and thanks contributors to the foundation. If you are interested in contributing to the Endowment Foundation, please call NEHA at (303) 756-9090. You can also donate online at www.neha.org/about-neha/donate.

Thank you.

DELEGATE CLUB

(\$1–\$99)

Name in the Journal for 1 year.

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(\$500–\$999)

Name submitted in drawing for a free 1-year NEHA membership and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Ned Therien
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(\$1,000–\$2,499)

Name submitted in drawing for a free 2-year NEHA membership and name in the Journal for 1 year.

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(\$5,000–\$100,000)

Special invitation to the AEC President's Reception and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Vincent J. Radke