It is time to coordinate our efforts and communicate these critical activities to you as our members.

Moving Forward Through Collaboration, Coordination, and Communication

We are off to a running start following our 77th Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition in Washington, DC, this year. It was a pleasure to meet many of you in person and hear the overwhelmingly positive response regarding the quality educational program presented. And it was an honor to witness our esteemed and deserving colleagues receive recognition for their accomplishments.

In this column, I will touch on a few activities and projects that will keep NEHA’s board of directors busy in the coming months and also include a glance at the year ahead. These projects require a huge effort by the board, members, volunteers, and the NEHA staff. I hope you will notice throughout this column a common theme that incorporates some of my favorite words—Collaboration, Coordination, and Communication!

- **Building partnerships.** This is an area where the board of directors and NEHA staff truly excel! What a privilege to be part of this team. Along with board members Brian Collins, Keith Johnson, Roy Kroeger, and Adam London, I have participated in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Partnership for Food Protection and will continue to work with FDA leadership to represent NEHA members as the important work of implementing the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act continues. NEHA is represented on a number of national councils and is very involved in developing food safety and food defense courses for environmental health professionals. To assist with coordinating these efforts, I recently appointed a NEHA Food Protection Team. Many thanks to NEHA’s Food Safety Technical Advisors, Scott Holmes and John Marcello, and the food safety experts who represent us on various committees and councils around the country. Due to our partnerships and collaborative efforts, we have seats at the table. Now, it is time to coordinate our efforts and communicate these critical activities to you as our members.

- **Development of two new NEHA awards.** To better recognize our fellow practitioners for the phenomenal work that is done every day, NEHA debuted two new awards this year that were presented for the first time at the AEC. The awards, the Environmental Health Innovation Award and the Educational Contribution Award, were designed to recognize our peers who implement innovative practices and develop valuable educational tools for the environmental health profession. These new awards will serve to highlight individuals, jurisdictions, or organizations that have either developed an effective tool, overcome a challenge, or identified a need and addressed it. These new award opportunities will help us communicate new practices to our members and foster greater collaboration.

  Thanks to Nelson Fabian, David Ludwig, Terry Osner, Kristen Ruby, and the board of directors for making these awards possible this year.

- **Affiliate communication.** NEHA has 52 affiliate associations. It has been my goal for quite some time to improve communication with our affiliates. During the 2012 AEC in San Diego the affiliates requested a simple mechanism for information sharing, such as posting announcements or submitting a request for assistance from a subject-matter expert or a board member. After working with fellow board members and NEHA staff, I am pleased to report that we now have an electronic communication tool in place. It is an electronic form that, once completed by an affiliate president, will either prompt a blast e-mail to the other 51 affiliate presidents or it will be submitted to the appropriate board member, staff member, technical advisor, or other resource as needed.

- **Student mentorship program.** This program is a very important investment in the future of our profession. I must recognize Dr. Sheila Pressley of Eastern Kentucky University and the American Academy of Sanitarians (AAS) liaison for her leadership and facilitation of the mentorship...
program; the mentors from AAS; the Past Presidents’ Affiliate for donating their time and sharing their expertise; and NEHA staff member Terry Osner for coordinating the student mentoring sessions at the 2013 AEC. I have asked President-Elect Dr. Carolyn Harvey to lead the student mentorship and leadership program for the 2014 AEC. Kudos to the mentors for investing their valuable time in the future generations of environmental health professionals.

This year, 32 students participated in the program. Our goal is to increase that number next year. Through collaboration and coordination with our partners in academia for student recruitment, this can be accomplished. This past summer, two new Technical Advisor appointments were made specifically for the student mentorship program. With the input we received from conference participants this year, we are transforming the existing student-focused program into a leadership development program that will provide expanded benefit to students, individuals reentering the profession, and seasoned professionals looking to hone their leadership skills.

• *Key definitions for environmental health.* In April 2012, an ad hoc work group was convened by the board of directors to examine the definition of the term “environmental health.” Region 7 Vice President John Steward was assigned to lead a team of peers from across the country to evaluate how the term was being used and to research the definitions used by other entities. After gathering input from members and the public, NEHA’s definition of “environmental health” has been revised and the definition of “environmental health professional” has been developed. Each of these definitions was recently approved by the NEHA board. The new definitions and a full summary of the team’s one-year journey are chronicled on page 72 of this issue. Congratulations to John and the entire team for tackling this important task that will impact our messages both within the profession and when communicating environmental health information to the public.

• *NEHA 2014 AEC & Exhibition.* The 2014 AEC will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, where we will unite with our colleagues from the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) for a joint conference. What an exciting opportunity! The last time IFEH held a conference in the U.S. was in San Diego in 2002. We were pleased to have IFEH President Peter Davey as an honored guest at the 2013 AEC. Coo hosting the 2014 IFEH conference will provide NEHA an opportunity to work together with Peter and others from IFEH to provide an enhanced online learning component at the conference. We are also thrilled to introduce a special feature within the 2014 conference—an international career fair. The career fair will be available to all in attendance, students and aspiring professionals as well as anyone seeking to make a career or life change. Once again, I must acknowledge Dr. Carolyn Harvey for her leadership role in building this exceptional opportunity for NEHA members.

New endeavors aside, the day-to-day business of the association keeps the NEHA staff, board of directors, technical advisors, the Journal’s technical editors and peer reviewers, and many members and other volunteers busy throughout the year. This team of extraordinary people makes me proud to be involved with NEHA—I find deep reward in having a connection with each of you who work to enhance our organization, our profession, and our shared mission. Having member input, support, and commitment to this organization makes leading the nation’s premier organization for environmental health professionals extremely gratifying. I thank you all as we move forward!

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**NEHA MEMBERSHIP**

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NEHA is working hard to bring you a membership that fits your particular wants and needs. We are working to evolve the NEHA membership options available to you including a multiyear dues option and the opportunity to receive an electronic version of the *Journal of Environmental Health*.

Updates and information are available on the NEHA Web site.

Find out more at neha.org/member.