

## ► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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As I sit here at my computer, I think about the year that has just passed and the new year that we are about to begin. Over the last year I was invited to many state affiliate meetings to represent NEHA. At each of these affiliate meetings I gave a NEHA “state of the association” presentation, as well as presentations on various environmental health subjects, and many times, an interactive discussion about our profession and the practice of environmental health.

As we go into this new year, all of us should renew our journey to become more effective environmental health professionals. As we seek to continually elevate our profession, it is a good time to define the elements that an environmental health professional must possess.

Of course, the highest priority for the environmental health professional is technical competency. Knowledge of the science behind all our environmental decisions and actions is the keystone of our profession. Competency in our technical knowledge is certainly a basic building block for our profession. Technical knowledge, however, is just the beginning of building our professional capacity.

Every environmental health professional should also attempt to master the human sciences and liberal arts, including risk identification and communications, public speaking, technical writing, and interpersonal relations. The environmental health professional must not only know the science behind our actions, but must be able to communicate the reasons for our decisions to individuals, groups, stakeholders, and public officials.

## The Environmental Health Professional

*Being an environmental health professional is a difficult and complicated career that has its rewards and satisfactions.*

Credentials, certifications, technical competency, and scientific-based methods are the foundation we all need. The ability to identify and communicate effectively, however, is equally important to being a successful environmental health professional.

After practicing in our profession for four decades, I would like to share my thoughts on the elements that seem to be common denominators for most, if not all, of the successful environmental health professionals I have known.

Ethics is a set of values that guide our decisions, influence our actions, and give purpose to our lives. Professional and personal ethics in the environmental health practice are the cornerstones that help us make good decisions daily, which protect public health and promote the public's trust in our profession. Many of the decisions we are faced with are

prescribed by the laws and regulations that guide our programs. We face decisions daily, however, that are either too complicated or lie outside our legal guidelines. It is at these moments that we are guided by our ethics. Usually, it is these decisions that will have the greatest effect on our community.

Ethics not only guide our decisions, but they also help us navigate complex situations that have no easy or clear answers. The ethical professional knows that every decision or action might have significant consequences downstream from the present. In an ever-changing profession, along with technical expertise, ethical behavior is arguably the foundation of success personally and professionally.

Coalition building is another skill that the successful environmental health professional must develop and use. In a time where we all must deal with reduced budgets, limited time, and legal and fiscal restraints, the environmental health professional must develop and implement coalitions and partnerships to expand good environmental health practices to diverse communities. We must collaborate with stakeholders, allied professionals, governmental agencies, and nongovernmental organizations to leverage our influence locally and nationally. It is through this cooperative coalition building that the environmental health professional can introduce new stakeholders to environmental health principles and actions. Coalition building also allows us to educate more of the general public about our profession and environmental health as a basic component of good public health.

Flexibility as a professional is a skill that all successful environmental health professionals possess. Our rapidly changing field of practice, new technologies, changing laws, emerging environmental health threats, and fiscal limitations are just a few of the conditions that the environmental health professional must deal with continually.

Objectivity and compassion, although sounding completely opposite, are “two sides of the same coin.” Developing an objective view of environmental health problems, solutions, and outcomes must be balanced by the environmental health professional with compassion for stakeholders. We must consider what our decisions or actions might mean to individuals, families, and communities. Even though we must develop objectivity in the identification of problems and solutions,

we must have compassion for the people our decisions and actions can affect.

We have recently seen on the television news how the disconnect between objectivity and compassion can have serious and far-reaching effects on stakeholders and communities. As successful environmental health professionals, it is incumbent upon us, no matter what level we work at, to keep the strict balance between objectivity and compassion.

Dedication to our profession is an important component that we must inculcate in order to be successful in our profession. Dedication is a quality that develops as we practice our skills daily in local, state, and federal agencies; industry; and private practice. Dedication is the characteristic that builds the foundation for what it means to be an environmental health professional. With-

out dedication, the successful professional would not take on the difficult problems or implement, at times, the unpopular solution. Without dedication we would not work the long hours, attend public meetings, facilitate discussions, or find solutions.

Being an environmental health professional is a difficult and complicated career that has its rewards and satisfactions.

What does it mean to me to be an environmental health professional? To me it means that I can be proud of being a part of the environmental health profession because I know we all labor to make the world more healthy and safe. 🐼

David E. Riggs

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## Did You Know?

Hotel reservations for NEHA's 2017 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition will open in late December! Make your plans to join NEHA in Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 10–13 for our 81st AEC. Visit [www.neha.org/aec](http://www.neha.org/aec) for more information.

# 2017

ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS NOW

## Walter S. Mangold Award

The Walter S. Mangold Award recognizes an individual for extraordinary achievement in environmental health. Since 1956, this award acknowledges the brightest and best in the profession. NEHA is currently accepting nominations for this award by an affiliate in good standing or by any five NEHA members, regardless of their affiliation.

The Mangold is NEHA's most prestigious award and while it recognizes an individual, it also honors an entire profession for its skill, knowledge, and commitment to public health.

Nomination deadline is  
March 15, 2017.



To access the online application, visit [www.neha.org/walter-s-mangold-award](http://www.neha.org/walter-s-mangold-award).