The field of environmental health covers an extraordinary breadth of technical subject areas. Environmental health practitioners are expected to be proficient in everything from air quality to zoonotic disease. A generalist may routinely deal with food safety, wastewater, drinking water, solid waste, and more in a single day. Specialists may be responsible for highly specific programs such as emerging pathogens, radiation protection, or risk assessment associated with nanoparticles. This diversity is one of the many reasons that environmental health is challenging, rewarding, and ever changing.

NEHA’s primary mission is advancing the environmental health professional and enhancing technical competency has always been a major focus. The NEHA Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition, the Journal of Environmental Health, NEHA-sponsored training programs, and NEHA credentialing are all aimed at expanding and ensuring technical competence and proficiency. While much of this work is the product of talented NEHA staff, NEHA members perform a significant role in providing the required knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Opportunities to Serve
NEHA provides many opportunities for members like you and me to contribute to the profession. You might be interested in presenting or moderating at a conference. Authoring a paper or serving as a peer reviewer are also options. Representing NEHA as a subject-matter expert is another route of service that has recently grown in scale and scope.

My first significant involvement in NEHA began more than 20 years ago when I volunteered to serve as a subject-matter expert, specifically as the Section Chair for the Hazardous Materials Section. More recently I again served as a Section Chair, this time for the Leadership Development Section. During these times the primary responsibility for a Section Chair was to select and coordinate the speakers for the allotted program track at NEHA’s AEC.

The Evolution of Section Chairs to Technical Advisors
The resources and needs of NEHA have evolved over time and NEHA now has a professional education coordinator with the responsibility for program speakers and logistics. Recognizing this change as now allowing Section Chairs to assume a broader role to more fully utilize their subject-matter expertise, the NEHA board of directors agreed this past year to expand the scope of subject matter areas and change the title from “Section Chair” to a more appropriate title of “NEHA Technical Advisor.”

Areas of Subject-Matter Expertise
The NEHA board of directors adopted the following list of Technical Advisor Areas of Expertise: Ambient Air; Children’s EH; Disaster/Emergency Response; Drinking Water; Emerging Pathogens; Environmental Justice; Food (including safety and defense); General; Hazardous Materials/Toxic Substances; Healthy Homes and Healthy Communities; Indoor Air; Injury Prevention; Institutions/Schools; International; Land Use Planning/Design; Legal; Management Policy (including leadership); Meteorology/Weather/Global Climate Change; Occupational Health/Safety; Pools/Spas; Radiation/Radon; Recreational EH; Risk Assessment; Sustainability; Technology (including computers, software, GIS, management applications); Terrorism/All Hazards Preparedness; Vector Control; Wastewater; Water Pollution Control/Water Quality; Workforce Development.

There was a clear awareness that this list is not static. There will be periodic additions, deletions, and consolidations to address the dynamics of our profession.
Responsibilities of NEHA Technical Advisors

NEHA Technical Advisors are now responsible for providing subject-matter expertise and counsel to the NEHA president, NEHA board, NEHA staff, NEHA affiliates, and the NEHA membership. In addition to providing assistance to the NEHA education coordinator, Technical Advisors have broadened roles and responsibilities. The NEHA board adopted a list of specific duties that included the following: staying abreast of the latest developments and educational needs of professionals within specific areas of expertise; identifying and sharing trends and needs of importance to NEHA's education coordinator; actively cooperating with and assisting NEHA's education coordinator in the development and implementation of NEHA AEC program tracks; assisting NEHA in responding to press inquiries, developing position papers, serving as an expert witness, and speaking on behalf of the association; and other activities as requested and agreed upon by the NEHA board of directors.

A Call to Serve

As was the case with Section Chairs, NEHA Technical Advisors are appointed by the NEHA president in consultation and with input from the NEHA board, NEHA staff, and NEHA membership. I was pleased to be able to appoint many former Section Chairs to newly created Technical Advisor assignments, and as a bonus the expanded categories and routine turnover ensure that there are numerous and continuing opportunities for those interested in serving the profession in this important capacity. I invite you to review the list of subject-matter areas and consider volunteering to become a NEHA Technical Advisor. As is the case with so many volunteer activities, the pay might be low, but the rewards can be great!

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• Substantial Savings with Member Pricing on
  • NEHA's Annual Educational Conference (AEC)
  • NEHA credential renewal and exam fees
  • Resources from NEHA's Online Bookstore

• Opportunities for Important Professional Education Programs
  • NEHA workshops at little or no cost
  • NEHA Sabbatical Exchange Program

• Discounts on
  • Rental cars
  • Air express services
  • Freight services

• Eligibility for
  • Professional liability insurance
  • Metrum Credit Union

Did You Know?

The deadlines to submit nominations for the Sabbatical Exchange Program, Mangold Award, and Samuel J. Crumbine Consumer Protection Award are coming up in March. To submit your nominations, visit www.neha.org/about/awardinfo.html. The award winners will be honored at the NEHA 2012 AEC.