

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Sandra Long, REHS, RS

Credentialing: Would You Go to a Plumber if You Had the Flu?

As environmental health professionals, we understand that environmental health is the area of public health that deals with all the different ways the world around us can impact us. Environmental health monitors and addresses those physical, chemical, and biological factors that we might not have direct control over. It is one of the most diverse professional fields in terms of scope and reach. Environmental health professionals can be found performing food inspections, monitoring air and water quality, conducting soil analyses, and engaging in emergency management and disease control, to name a few. With all that environmental health encompasses, why is it not a credential-required profession in all states and counties?

What does it mean to be credentialed? A simple definition is that a credential is something that gives credit or qualifies someone to be suitable for a particular job. It identifies that person as having met a specific criteria, knowledge, training, or educational level that can be verified. Credentials signify competency. A credential attests that the person has completed a process verifying their level of competency. Professional credentials are earned through a formal process of examination.

Some states have their own credentialing programs that provide verification of the level of competency as set forth by that state. The point is that there are guidelines and criteria to be met to achieve a level of competency to qualify for an examination for a credential. Someone cannot simply wake up one morning and decide they have the knowledge and experience to be a nurse and start putting RN (regist-

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tered nurse) after their name. Nor can someone apply for a nursing credential examination or begin working as a nurse without verification of their education, training, and experience. I am not aware of a state that will allow someone to work as a nurse without a valid credential. So, why are environmental health professionals not required to obtain a credential in all states? The work of environmental health professionals to ensure safe food, water, and air and to respond to emergencies has a significant impact on the public and public health.

Quality work requires a competent workforce. A competent workforce must be well trained, educated, and knowledgeable in providing the appropriate services. With the broad scope of services provided by environmental health professionals, it is essential that a competent workforce is maintained.

The most compelling reason for credentialing is a qualified, competent workforce. Credentialing ensures that environmental health

professionals are qualified and knowledgeable, as well as that their education and training can be verified and meets a set criteria. Additionally, the requirement of continuing education to maintain the credential ensures the workforce remains relevant.

The requirement of a credential is the key element, whether that credential be the National Environmental Health Association's Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS), Certified Professional—Food Safety (CP-FS), or a similar credential as it is named in your state. The credential provides recognition of expertise and distinction as a professional.

The work of the environmental health professional improves quality of life by providing a safe and wholesome environment in which to live. In order to provide this safe and wholesome environment, the environmental health professional must have the scientific knowledge to achieve these goals—knowledge that comes from specific education and training. Verification and validation of this knowledge and training ensures a standard of performance. Credentialing ensures a standard within the profession.

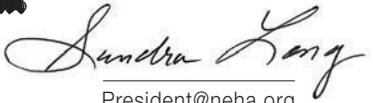
Achieving a credential demonstrates commitment to your profession and sets you apart as a professional in your field. It also demonstrates how well you perform to set standards. It provides a level of confidence in your job performance and enhances trust in your knowledge. Credential holders are an asset to the workplace and the profession. Credentials reflect achievement, build self-esteem, improve career opportunities, and enhance professional image.

So, why are credentials not required for all environmental health professionals? Is it because there is not an emphasis on the importance of a credential? It is important to have a professional workforce with set standards of knowledge, education, training, and

skill levels. This type of workforce can be achieved through credentialing.

A credential makes you credible. It attests to your knowledge or competency in the profession, a goal we should all strive toward. As environmental health professionals, we need to

increase the awareness of the importance of the profession and the credentialing of the professional. 🐼



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Did You Know?

Members are extremely important to NEHA and its mission. NEHA's membership structure includes five different membership categories—Professional, Emerging Professional, Retired Professional, International, and Life. Environmental health professionals can benefit from NEHA membership at any career stage. NEHA membership provides credibility (credentials and leadership opportunities), learning (*Journal*, conferences, and continuing education), community (events, blogs, and webinars), and influence (advocacy and position papers). Learn more at www.neha.org/join.

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.

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