NEHA’s COVID-19 Response and Resources
By Kristen Ruby-Cisneros (kruhy@neha.org)

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) a pandemic. At the time of writing (March 31, 2020), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports 163,539 cases (both confirmed and presumptive positive) of COVID-19 in the U.S. with 2,860 total deaths. Shelter-in-place orders have been issued statewide in 33 states as of March 31, 2020. Globally, WHO reports 754,948 confirmed cases and 36,571 confirmed deaths, with over 203 countries, areas, or territories affected. These reported numbers probably do not represent how many people are actually sick or have died; however, they do provide us with a somber picture of the impact and spread of this pandemic. COVID-19 has changed the landscape of our world and has impacted all of our lives. In these uncertain times, one thing that is certain is that the importance of environmental public health has been thrust into the spotlight.

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) is closely monitoring developments from the COVID-19 pandemic and is working to provide members and stakeholders with access to critical information and updates. Across the U.S. and around the globe, environmental health professionals are on the frontlines of preventive public health services delivery and we are committed to supporting the environmental health workforce to effectively and safely do their jobs.

In regard to NEHA’s Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition, a news release was issued on March 6, 2020, that stated we are actively monitoring current developments related to COVID-19 and the potential impacts to the 2020 AEC in New York City, New York, July 13–16. At the present, we are not planning to cancel the AEC and are moving forward with the July conference as scheduled. We will continue to make attendee safety and well-being a priority as we plan the AEC and any changes to the AEC status will be communicated to the NEHA community immediately. For the latest AEC updates, please visit www.neha.org/aec.

On March 16, 2020, the NEHA office transitioned to a 100% telework schedule to protect the health and safety of our employees and communities. We are working hard from our homes to ensure that normal operations within the organization are carried out and that we meet the needs and requests of our members, partners, and stakeholders. “Ebola, H1N1, H5N1, MERS, SARS, and COVID-19 have one characteristic in common, they are rooted in environmental health. This is a teachable moment, one our association is committed to. In the meantime, we encourage our constituencies to surveil and adhere to CDC recommendations, as we do,” stated NEHA Executive Director Dr. David Dyjack.

Contact information for critical services such as credentialing, member services, books and sales, finance, the AEC, and administration can be found at www.neha.org/news-events/latest-news/neha-transitions-teleworking-response-covid-19-pandemic. You can also find a staff listing on page 46. The decision for staff to return to the Denver office will be based upon city and state directives, as well as guidance from CDC and WHO.

NEHA has created a COVID-19 resources page for environmental health professionals at www.neha.org/covid-19. Information about COVID-19 was first posted on January 30, 2020. That posted page included several links to additional information and resources, as well as a video of NEHA Executive Director Dr. David Dyjack and Program and Partnership Development Director Jesse Bliss discussing the COVID-19 outbreak (www.neha.org/news-events/latest-news/neha-actively-monitoring-coronavirus-disease-2019-outbreak). Since that time, we have worked diligently to provide a more comprehensive resources page. The current resources page provides links organized in the following categories: Pandemic Situation Reports; About the Disease; Guidance for Work, Schools, & Homes; COVID-19 & Food Safety; and Related Journal of Environmental Health Articles.

Original COVID-19 content from NEHA is also being produced or considered. For example, we recently posted two guidance documents on COVID-19 and food safety for food establishments and food safety regulators. These documents will be updated as new information comes to light and can be accessed on our COVID-19 resources page at www.neha.org/covid-19. We plan to produce weekly podcasts that highlight various environmental health disciplines, such as retail food safety, recreational water, international partner activities, early childhood education facilities, etc., through a COVID-19 lens. Grant opportunities are being pursued. We also conducted a rapid needs assessment of the environmental health profession on March 25, 2020, and a summary of the survey has been produced and is posted at www.neha.org/covid-19.

A vacuum for obtaining continuing education has been created with social distancing, shelter-in-place orders, and local conferences and events being canceled. In response to this need, NEHA is offering free access to online trainings to all environmental health professionals regardless of membership status starting on March 30, 2020. The online trainings include webinars, partner courses, and NEHA’s E-Learning videos of sessions from the 2017–2019 AECs. By completing these videos, webinars, and courses, environmental health professionals can earn continuing education contact hours toward their NEHA credentials. At this time, open access will be available for 90 days. Information about the online training offerings and how to access them can be found at www.neha.org/elearning.

As changes are occurring daily, our association decisions, plans for resources, and operations can change. Please bookmark www.neha.org/covid-19 and check it often for updates. We strive to provide you with the most relevant and up-to-date information and resources so you can do your jobs effectively and safely. From all at NEHA, we thank those working in our communities and across the globe to protect the health and safety of the public and the environment. As we know—and now is the time to show the whole world—environmental health matters!
NEHA Staff Profile

As part of tradition, NEHA features new staff members in the Journal around the time of their 1-year anniversary. These profiles give you an opportunity to get to know the NEHA staff better and to learn more about the great programs and activities going on in your association. This month we are pleased to introduce you to one NEHA staff member. Contact information for all NEHA staff can be found on page 46.

Kim Koenig

I came to NEHA in May 2019 having worked in instructional design and training delivery for 11 years. Prior to joining the Entrepreneurial Zone team at NEHA, I worked for the University of Colorado Health Authority, University of Denver, and a variety of health and professional organizations as a curriculum developer, analyst, and principal trainer.

Much of my work as an instructional designer involves working with domain experts to create curriculum for professional, technical, and academic projects or programs of study. Collaborating with subject matter experts is personally enriching because I learn so much with every project. At NEHA, I’ve had the privilege of working with members who are some of the most competent subject matter experts I’ve ever worked with.

I love to learn and it’s a wonderful byproduct of the work I do. Along the way I’ve been a subject matter expert myself, becoming a certified analyst for multiple clinical enterprise applications, collaborating on system development while developing training programs as well.

I enjoy coordinating stakeholder input and pulling together the narrative of a course and, ultimately, crafting tools that help people learn and understand. Instructional design is dynamic and creative, too. Keeping up with technology and creating across many different modes keeps me energized. And I need it—my husband and I are very busy keeping up with our four fantastically unique kids, three geriatric dogs, and our horse, which has me happily running at both ends.

Since joining NEHA, I’ve been developing training components and am currently working on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Hurricane Supplemental projects focused on the U.S. Virgin Islands. I look forward to working with the rest of the Entrepreneurial Zone team to upgrade NEHA’s catalog of training products and to optimize the effectiveness of education, certificate, and credential offerings.

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anticipate the release of a funding opportunity to support us in this exciting and long overlooked component of our programmatic portfolio—telling our professional story.

We’ve also reengineered our annual conference to provide affiliate leadership with training on association management, which we feel is a wonderful opportunity to share stories of success and failure and to learn from each other. Our Journal is also planning to provide affiliates with space in this publication to directly share affiliate developments, opportunities, and challenges with the profession writ-large.

While we are sensitive to affiliate needs, we have been blessed by affiliate contributions to the overall professional enterprise. Our Business and Industry Affiliate (BIA) has sponsored and presented several national webinars over the last 18 months. These webinars have received accolades for their content and delivery, and attendance has been impressive. Recent BIA webinars have included the following titles: Power of Partnerships; How to Dodge the Spread. We acknowledge that industry is frequently a leader in adopting new practices and technologies and we collectively benefit when the private and governmental sectors collaborate.

The Uniformed Services Environmental Health Association (USEHA) is also an important and foundational professional constituency. They plan to host their annual USEHA Educational Program Day at the NEHA 2020 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition in New York City, providing a full day of environmental health presentations given by their uniformed services members. We encourage all AEC attendees to join them at the USEHA Educational Program Day. USEHA also plans to offer a scholarship to a uniformed services member to attend the NEHA 2020 AEC. I am proud of our members in uniform.

The three sisters showcase the wisdom of our Native American forefathers. This system is a classic case of how agrosystems, ecosystems, and diets are more productive and healthier when careful thought and consideration are invested into the management system that supports them. We honor the Native Americans who identified this approach. We humbly borrow from their ideas and are committed to ensuring our affiliates remain vibrant and viable as we nurture the future of the profession.

The Texas Environmental Health Association in action. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.

Strengthening Agency and Industry Relationships; Boil Water What?!? When Good Water Goes Bad; and Coming Clean About Norovirus: How to Dodge the Spread. We acknowledge that industry is frequently a leader in adopting new practices and technologies and we collectively benefit when the private and governmental sectors collaborate.

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