

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Sandra Long, REHS, RS

Advocating for the Profession

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) Board of Directors allocates time in the spring to meet with senators and representatives on Capitol Hill to educate, discuss, and present information on environmental health issues. The purpose is to garner support for environmental health. This year, due to the pandemic and other events, the NEHA board will be having virtual meetings for this purpose.

The board enters these meetings well prepared with talking points, specific items to be addressed, and a designated amount of time to share our message. Most of these meetings start with explaining what environmental health is. Many times, legislators think we are there to talk about saving trees or polluted water. I like to start with asking them if they had any concerns about the water used in their morning coffee, or if they were concerned about getting sick from the food they consumed if they stopped somewhere for breakfast, or if they had any concerns about mosquito-borne illness. I follow this line of questions to illustrate that environmental health is at work to ensure that the public is safe and do not have to question these things. It makes legislators realize the scope of environmental health. The education we provide includes defining environmental health and highlighting the various programs, job titles, and roles we play in keeping everyone safe on a daily basis.

As legislators are in session in our respective states, we need to diligently track bills that could affect environmental health. From a political perspective, legislators want to do what is best for the population they represent, which could mean sources of income

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for businesses or families. They might not be aware of the impact on environmental health. To assist you, NEHA has policy and position statements that are accessible on the NEHA website to support environmental health positions on various topics (www.neha.org/policy-position-statements). These statements are routinely updated utilizing subject matter experts and NEHA staff.

We need to remember that representatives and senators work for us. With environmental health professions in the forefront for the past year—putting pandemic protocols in place, working with concurrent emergency issues, and more recently assisting in coordinating vaccine efforts, all while maintaining daily operations—it is an optimum time for us to remind legislators of our duties that we perform on a daily basis. Inform them of the importance of environmental health and how it affects all aspects of daily life for every resi-

dent. We need to educate and make legislators aware of the issues they are or will be discussing. Do we want to save an economy but make people sick in the process? Some look at bills only from a financial perspective and the economic impact it will have on a community, not seeing or being unaware of the environmental health impacts that certain legislation could bring. Cottage foods, raw milk, and home restaurants are examples of legislation that if passed without input from environmental health, could result in regulations (or a lack of regulation) that negatively impact environmental and public health.

As practitioners of environmental health, we need to not only take an interest in environmental legislation but also be stewards of the profession and voice our input on the issues raised. Contact your representatives with science-based information on the legislation at hand. This outreach is an opportunity to educate them on what environmental health is and how the legislation they are proposing impacts environmental and public health. When approached with sound, science-based information, presented in a clear and logical manner, representatives are provided with information that is traceable and credible. They are not being presented with opinions that do not have merit; conversely, they are being presented with fact-based information to consider.

What many do not realize is that our legislators are not experts in the areas in which they champion legislation. They rely on information provided by the person or group who proposed the legislation. When legislation is sent to various committees for

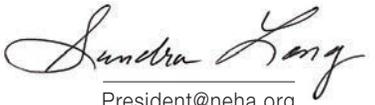
deliberation, committee members, many of whom do not have expertise of the subject matter presented in the legislation, hear the information provided and weigh that information against the possible outcomes. It is important, therefore, for us as environmental health professionals to be aware of the committees and their members so that we can present information that is valuable to the decision-making process. Always keep in mind that we are the experts, we are the personnel that have experience with environmental health issues. In the end, once

legislation goes into effect, we are the “boots on the ground” who are impacted by the outcomes, either positively or negatively.

While many are not comfortable with contacting legislators, a letter or email is simple to write. Your message does not need to be long but it should be supported with fact-based information. Remember that every voice counts and it is our responsibility as environmental health professionals to provide our expertise in legislative matters.

NEHA Hill Day 2021 will take place on April 22. On this day, NEHA board members

and staff leadership will speak to senators and representatives of the 117th U.S. Congress on environmental health issues in a virtual format. Our goal is to educate and inform these legislators and to keep environmental health in the forefront. We undertake this endeavor because of our dedication to the profession. I encourage you to do the same with your state and local legislators. 🐼


President@neha.org

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.

DELEGATE CLUB

(\$1–99)

Name in the Journal for 1 year.

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Letter from the NEHA president and name in the Journal for 1 year.

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D. Gary Brown
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Darryl J. Flaspahler
Gwendolyn R. Johnson
T. Stephen Jones
Sharon L. Kline
Sandra Long
John A. Marcello
Wendell A. Moore
Priscilla Oliver
Larry A. Ramdin
Matthew Reighter
Michèle Samarya-Timm
Jill M. Shugart
Jacqueline Taylor
Linda Van Houten
Sandra Whitehead

21st CENTURY CLUB

(\$500–999)

Name submitted in drawing for a free 1-year NEHA membership and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Amer El-Ahraf
Ned Therien
Leon F. Vinci

SUSTAINING MEMBERS CLUB

(\$1,000–2,499)

Name submitted in drawing for a free 2-year NEHA membership and name in the Journal for 1 year.

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George A. Morris
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Walter P. Saraniecki
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AFFILIATES CLUB

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Robert W. Custard
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EXECUTIVE CLUB AND ABOVE

(>\$5,000)

Special invitation to the AEC President's Reception and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Vincent J. Radke