NEHA Credential Map Project

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) is known across the country as the gold standard for environmental health credentials and in particular, for our premier credential, the Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS). The REHS/RS credential was a main impetus for the founding of NEHA over 80 years ago. It is incumbent on NEHA to track and support state-level REHS/RS credentials as part of our mission to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce.

In 2021, the NEHA Endowment Fund Committee agreed to finance a credential map project using a small percentage of donated funds to showcase how our donors have provided support to the profession and its future. This project was focused on creating a detailed map that displays REHS/RS credentialing requirements across the U.S. The work was done jointly by NEHA staff, interns, affiliates, and board members, and was released in February 2022.

Through research conducted on REHS/RS credential recognition and requirements across the U.S., NEHA Government Affairs Director Doug Farquhar and intern Georgia Lo assembled a methodical and important approach to mapping out the data. By identifying states and jurisdictions that require or use the REHS/RS credential, NEHA will be able to gauge the popularity of the credential and where the credential is valued, as well as where it is no longer used.

As with other health professions, the environmental health credential is adopted and administered by individual states, often mandated by state rule or statute. State credentialing has established procedures for achieving the credential and has minimum attributes or standards individuals must meet to apply for and maintain the credential or license. These attributes include:

- formal educational levels attained,
- work experience in the profession,
- evaluation of competency, and
- demonstrated continuing education in the profession.

The NEHA REHS/RS credential is not a required standard unless adopted by a state or organization. Furthermore, there is no national credential mandated by the federal government.

REHS/RS Credential Recognition

An environmental health credential is recognized in 31 states. The NEHA REHS/RS credential remains the foremost certification for environmental health professionals and the environmental health workforce. An environmental health credential is required at some level in 28 states and Washington, DC. Specifically, 23 states require it by statute and 8 states recognize the REHS/RS credential. Of the 8 states that recognize the credential, the credential is voluntary in 4 states and 4 states have a state-mandated credential (Figure 1).

From data on the states that require an environmental health credential:

- 18 states require some level of continuing education to maintain registration renewal.
- 13 states have some type of formal or informal in-training or intern process specified by rule and all but one require interns to be licensed or registered.
- 17 states have a minimum work experience of 1 year in the field of environmental health with a non-environmental health bachelor's degree.
- 15 states use the NEHA REHS/RS credential exam for all or part of their proficiency testing. Moreover, 2 states have additional state exams, 5 states use a state-specific exam, and 1 state offers the option of either a state-specific or NEHA REHS/RS credential exam.
- 20 states have credential or licensing boards under a state government department. North Carolina is the only state that has an independent licensing board.
- 6 states are regulated under a state occupational licensing department and 14 states are regulated under a state health department.
- For non-environmental health bachelor's degrees, there is wide variability in the type of semester hours accepted under the education requirement. In addition, 2 states do not specify a minimum number of semester-accepted hours in science or other related disciplines.
- 2 states statutorily accept applicants for registration with an associate degree with a certain number of years of experience in environmental health.
19 states have no training or certification requirements for the environmental health profession.

At one point, 38 states required the REHS/RS credential or its equivalent. The reasons behind why states decided to weaken their environmental health credential requirement varies, but mainly policy makers determined that the credential was an unnecessary regulatory burden. The resources necessary by both the state and individuals to comply with an environmental health credential was not perceived to have an associated public health benefit and did not warrant the regulatory costs.

**REHS/RS Credential Exam**

An environmental health credential is required by statute in 23 states, and 17 of those states require passing the REHS/RS credential exam to enter the profession. An additional 6 states (Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Washington) require the exam but do not list the REHS/RS credential by statute. Montana requires the REHS/RS credential without the exam, as does Washington, DC. Additionally, 7 states offer a state-sponsored exam. Figure 2 shows the type of REHS/RS credential exam accepted by each state.

Certain known concerns about environmental health credentialing include that the bachelor’s degree requirement keeps many individuals from applying for the REHS/RS credential. This requirement can be prohibitive to sitting for the REHS/RS credential exam for many individuals, including people of color.

Nevertheless, the REHS/RS credential remains the premier credential for the environmental health workforce. Efforts are being made and must continue to be made to advocate for this credential. NEHA has a goal to make the REHS/RS the required credential for the environmental health profession in every state. To achieve this goal will require a committed effort by NEHA, the NEHA affiliates, and the environmental health profession.

For more information, visit www.neha.org/node/62422. You can also direct your questions to Doug Farquhar, director of Government Affairs, at dfarquhar@neha.org. Thank you to our supporters who donated to our Endowment Fund, we could not have done this work without your support!

**NEHA Releases 2021 Annual Report**

In late March 2021, NEHA released its 2021 Annual Report that summarizes the achievements of the organization to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce. The report demonstrates our continued commitment to being an essential partner and an influential voice in environmental health.

In addition to words from NEHA Executive Director Dr. David Dyjack and NEHA President Roy Kroeger, the report provides a visual picture of our achievements under the following headings:

- **We Educated:** The events NEHA hosted in 2021 are highlighted—from the 2021 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition held virtually to more than 40 webinars hosted. Information on courses we created, updated, provided, delivered, developed, expanded, or presented are also included.
- **We Informed:** The ways in which we informed the profession are spotlighted, including 10 issues of the *Journal of Environmental Health* published and sharing valuable information and opportunities via a total of 119 emails, 22 E-News issues, and 2,366 social media posts.
- **We Supported:** Learn how NEHA designed and built a user-friendly application to award $6.3 million in funding for the NEHA-FDA Retail Flexible Funding Model Grant Program, developed more than 60 resources to enhance environmental health capabilities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, credentialled 572 individuals, approved over 41,000 online continuing education submissions, and much more.
- **We Elevated:** Read about the different policy statement NEHA developed on topics such as body art, vector control, preparedness, and food safety, as well as the work NEHA has done to promote justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion within the organization and the profession.
- **We Advocated:** Explore the letters, resolutions, and activities NEHA undertook to advocate for the environmental health profession.
- **We Connected:** Learn about the partnerships, communities of practice, and connections NEHA has established for environmental health professionals.
- **We Stewarded:** Get a picture of the financial health of NEHA through data on our revenue streams and functional expenses. The 2021 Annual Report can be viewed at www.neha.org/annual-reports. The webpage also includes annual reports from 2016–2020.
NEHA Staff Profiles

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 two NEHA staff members. Contact information for all NEHA staff can be found on pages 46 and 47.

Nick Bohnenkamp

Eager to leave Iowa in my early 20s, I roamed the West Coast for a few months, eventually landing in Colorado. After a few years working in the ski industry, I found that living in Denver both quenched my thirst for access to the outdoors as well as provided professional opportunities for an idealist interested in environmentalism and city building. I was fortunate to be involved in building one of the first bike sharing networks in the nation in Denver. Our nonprofit bike share system became a model for dozens of cities across the U.S. I left bike sharing with a love for bikes and a thirst for access to the outdoors as well as environmentalism and city building. I was fortunate to be involved in building one of the first bike sharing networks in the nation in Denver. Our nonprofit bike share system became a model for dozens of cities across the U.S. I left bike sharing with a love for bikes and a love for running a successful nonprofit.

Through that work I developed the experience and skills I use daily at NEHA. As the program and operations manager of Program and Partnership Development (PPD), I am responsible for the operations of the department. The responsibilities can be both broad and deep, including supporting our project coordinator efforts to meet scope, schedule, and budget across their portfolios; developing contracts and subaward agreements; redirecting project funds as plans change; assigning project cost codes; and supporting our cooperative agreement reporting efforts throughout the year. Behind the scenes I love thinking through standard operating procedures, process improvements, and striving to achieve a state of operational excellence across PPD.

When not at my keyboard I am fully engaged in the lives of my two young daughters—reliving my own childhood through them as I see them learn to ski, swim, build, bike, play, and most of all, negotiate every little thing.

Michele Samarya-Timm

When I began my career as a registered environmental health specialist in a local health department, I found there was a great depth and breadth to the profession and realized I needed additional confidence, more training, and a pathway to upskill my competencies. I came across the Journal of Environmental Health and decided to become a member of NEHA. And so, my connection with NEHA was born.

After becoming a member, I noticed a promotion in the Journal that was looking for NEHA members who were interested in participating on a committee to review food safety curricula. Through this call for members, I identified something I could do on my own time to apply my skills and add to my professional experiences and résumé. As such, I responded to the call. The NEHA staff welcomed me to the cadre of project volunteers and actually thanked me for my efforts—something that did not happen often in my experience in local environmental health. I was hooked and asked if I could volunteer more. The answer from NEHA was a resounding yes!

Over time, I had the pleasure of volunteering with NEHA on both core and groundbreaking projects: Epi-Ready, the Food-Safe Schools Action Guide, food defense, position statements, handwashing initiatives, surface sanitization infographics, and promoting women’s leadership in environmental health. I also had numerous opportunities to help coordinate and present a wide range of topics at the NEHA Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition as a section chair and technical advisor in food safety and protection, women’s issues, and workforce and leadership.

My active membership with NEHA defined and amplified my career. As I continue my professional journey, it was a perfect match for me to join the NEHA staff to “practice forward” and continue to concentrate on essential and innovative environmental health topics to assist the environmental health workforce in the same manner that NEHA has always done for me.

I am excited to have joined the NEHA Washington, DC, staff as part of the PPD team, specializing in preparedness. For me, this work is personal. Environmental health is regularly facing new and reoccurring challenges, and my focus is concentrating on projects to help our profession be more nimble, more prepared, more capable, and more visible. At its core, this work is about you—the NEHA members and boots-on-the-ground environmental health workforce—and the communities we have the pleasure and privilege to serve and protect.

Keep an eye out in the Journal and on the NEHA social media accounts and communications for resources and opportunities in the area of preparedness, as well as in other topics of value to the profession. I am so energized to be working with NEHA in this space! I look forward to engaging and reengaging with all.