

► **DirecTalk** MUSINGS FROM THE 10TH FLOOR

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On May 1, 2019, the National Environmental Health Association's (NEHA) board of directors spent a full 10 hours educating elected officials in Washington, DC, in an effort to support credentialing, in general, and the Environmental Health Workforce Act, in particular. In the U.S. House of Representative, the Environmental Health Workforce Act (HR 2262) was introduced by Representative Brenda Lawrence (D-Michigan). The U.S. Senate's companion bill (S 1137) was introduced by Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-Michigan). These pieces of legislation reinforce the critical role credentialed professionals play in protecting and promoting the health, safety, and security of Americans, their families, and their communities.

In that spirit, I've asked Sarah Hoover, NEHA's credentialing manager, to share her insight into the state our credentialing operation. Sarah and her credentialing department team—Eileen Neison, Carol Newlin, and Bobby Medina—are a valuable customer-oriented resource who collectively manage and maintain the globally recognized NEHA credentialing enterprise.

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## Credentialing Outlook

Sarah Hoover, MPH, PMP

I earned my first credential in 2012. It was based in clinical research and required hours of studying select parts of the Food and Drug Administration's *Code of Federal Regulations*. I sat for

## The Hallmark of Competence

*Earning a credential  
is investing in  
yourself.*

my exam on a muggy, midwestern Saturday morning and waited in agony for the results. I passed—and I was hooked. Since then, I have earned an advanced academic degree and two professional credentials. My mantra was and is, “Earning a credential is investing in yourself.”

Apparently, others share this sentiment. In 2015, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics added new questions to their Current Population Survey to begin to understand who holds professional licenses/credentials and how those individuals perform in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). With these newly added questions, 25.5% of the employed civilian survey population ( $N = 37,930$ ) indicated that they held a professional license or certification. When controlling for level of highest education attained, these respondents earned 11% more per week than their noncredentialed counterparts (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

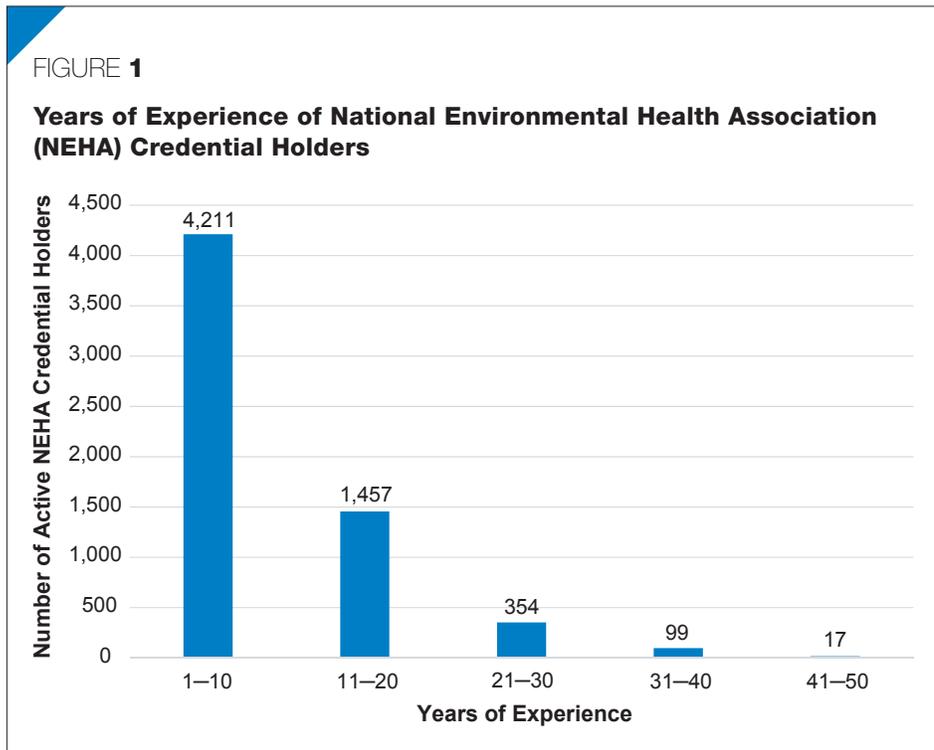
Individuals certainly see a benefit in becoming credentialed in their field of expertise and the professions they belong to benefit as well. It can be the case, such as with environmental health, that the health and safety of the human population benefits as credentialing ensures that population health and safety are in the hands of competent professionals who have demonstrated the knowledge and expertise to

perform at a high standard. So, I ask myself, in this win-win-win environment, what is NEHA's role in supporting, engaging, and growing credentialed environmental health professionals?

NEHA is a unique organization that offers membership, instruction, education, publications, certificates, and credentials to individuals interested in and passionate about our planet and the vitality of the people living in it. There are currently six different credentials available from NEHA that are as broad as touching all aspects of environmental health and safety and as niched as focusing on investigative foodborne outbreaks and third-party food facility auditing. Across these six different credentials, there are roughly 6,000 individuals actively holding a NEHA credential at any given time. Altogether, this population of credential holders possess up to 50 years of credentialed experience and span 7 countries (Figure 1, Table 1). With a rich resource of perspectives from professionals with a variety of environmental health roles, years of experience, and localities, NEHA will continue to learn from its credential holders how to support, engage, and grow the large community of those entrusted with the safety and health of the population.

Three obvious opportunities that jump out at me include technologically savvy credentialing, the international expansion of NEHA credentials, and priming the stage to support the Environmental Health Workforce Act of 2019. Our world is digital—most of our communication delivery is performed through the keyboards of our smartphones and tablets. These devices allow instant interfacing with profes-

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sional sites and social media avenues, which allows us to promote our professional brand to large audiences in a matter of minutes. I envision NEHA credential holders instantly accessing their credential via digital badges and receiving real time data on the status of their credential and continuing education, and then sharing that information with employers, peers, and potential customers in a timely and easy fashion. New applicants would be able to submit and monitor their application status through their MyNEHA account at any time.

Technology will certainly come into play as we expand into markets outside the U.S. In our Credentialing Department, we are seeing an uptick in international applicants from all over the world. Fortunately, our computer-based testing partner operates globally in the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and Africa (<https://home.pearsonvue.com/About-Pearson-VUE/Company-information/Locations.aspx>). There is more to be done than merely offering locations for exams. While it is a privilege to receive international interest and recognition, the responsibility and opportunity is upon us to deliver valuable and relevant credentialing support that answers the

charge of this year's Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition: "Local Voices. Universal Language." As we enhance our prestigious credentials with the ease and convenience of digital technology, we will consider the gaps that exist in the international arena, namely language and education differences, in order to welcome, engage, and support those interested in environmental health no matter where their local community resides on the map.

By embracing technological advances that add value, transparency, and portability to its current pool of credential holders and credential applicants, NEHA's Credentialing Department will be poised to manage and support the swell of credentialing needs that will come about from the bills currently in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate, advocating for national legislation of a credentialed environmental health workforce (National Environmental Health Association, 2019). To varying degrees, NEHA works with states that currently have credential programs in place and we look forward to growing, engaging, and supporting this national expansion to any extent possible.

Capitalizing on these opportunities takes infrastructure and a positive, willing attitude.

TABLE 1

**Countries/Territories With Active National Environmental Health Association Credential Holders**

Country/Territory
Bermuda
Canada
Guam
Jamaica
Saudi Arabia
United Kingdom
United States

At NEHA, we possess the attitude and are working on infrastructure that welcomes technology and increases our capacity to provide support and value to credential holders. We are also looking into what you, as credential holders, want to see from us as a return on your investment—your investment in yourself, your profession, and the populations you keep safe—by means of surveys and focus groups. I welcome your thoughts and ideas on what NEHA can do to support, engage, and grow outstanding environmental health professionals. Please send any questions and comments to [shoover@neha.org](mailto:shoover@neha.org).

**References**

National Environmental Health Association. (2019, April 10). *Environmental Health Workforce Act reintroduced into Congress*. Retrieved from <https://neha.org/news-events/latest-news/environmental-health-workforce-act-reintroduced-congress>

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