

NEHA NEWS

NEHA's Third Annual Hill Day

By Joanne Zurcher (jzurcher@neha.org)

On May 1, 2019, the National Environmental Health Association's (NEHA) board of directors traveled to Washington, DC, to visit Capitol Hill to advocate for NEHA members everywhere. They spent the day talking to senators, representatives, and their staff in over 50 offices from both political parties to ensure that the environmental health profession is at the table when it comes to major policy decisions. "This year's Hill Day was at once rewarding and impactful in that we had very specific pieces of preparedness and workforce legislation to advocate for during our conversations with elected officials," said NEHA Executive Director Dr. David Dyjack. "These efforts will bring over time recognition and resources to our members and the profession at large."

The major focus of the event was to share with staff from the highest level of influencers why we work as environmental health professionals and the importance of a credentialed profession to protect the public's health and safety. NEHA board members discussed the importance of having national guidelines so that every state has a credentialed environmental health workforce. "Organized visits to Capitol Hill are great leadership training experiences for all involved. Leaders need this continual training on the pressing issues to keep NEHA viable," stated NEHA President Dr. Priscilla Oliver.

NEHA board members and staff also asked members of Congress for their support of the Environmental Health Workforce Act of 2019 (HR 2262 and S 1137), which was introduced by Representative Brenda Lawrence (D-Michigan) in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-Michigan) in the U.S. Senate. These two pieces of legislation will ensure that the 22 states that currently do not require a credential for those that do environmental health work will have to start credentialing their environmental health workforce. Many staffers on both sides of the political aisle expressed deep interest in learning more about the legislation and promised to discuss it with their elected officials. "Hill Day provided a meaningful in person conversation with our national legislators while we serve as environmental public health ambassadors," reflected NEHA Region 8 Vice-President James Speckhart.

Another topic of discussion was the importance of funding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Environmental Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (NCEH/ATSDR). NCEH/ATSDR is a critical partner with NEHA in developing national environmental health programs. NEHA board members and staff relayed stories regarding the importance of NCEH/ATSDR's work and how that work helps in every aspect of public health and improves environmental health throughout the country. NEHA's Government Affairs program is committed to educating influencers in Washington, DC, on the importance of funding NCEH/ATSDR at the highest levels for fiscal



NEHA's board of directors convene at the U.S. Capitol Building before a very successful Third Annual Hill Day meeting with senators, representatives, and their staff from over 50 offices. From left to right: Jacqueline Reszetar, Adam London, Kim Carlton, David Dyjack, Lynne Madison, Roy Kroeger, Priscilla Oliver, Tim Hatch, Sandra Long, Matthew Reighter, Vince Radke, Tom Vyles, Larry Ramdin, and James Speckhart. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.



Before heading out for a day full of meetings, NEHA's board of directors prepared and strategized. Photo courtesy of Kristie Denbrock.

year 2019 and beyond. As stated by NEHA President-Elect Sandra Long, "Hill Day is a wonderful opportunity to meet with our legislators and provide education on environmental health issues."

Finally, this year is critical for the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act. The original law was created to improve the nation's public health and medical preparedness and response capabilities for emergencies, whether deliberate, accidental, or



NEHA board members and staff meet with Representative Nita Lowey's (D-New York) staff to discuss environmental health funding. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.

natural. Unfortunately, the law has already sunset. The U.S. House of Representatives has already passed the reauthorization of the law; however, the U.S. Senate has not and needs to pass it in an expedient manner. A bipartisan group of senators are working diligently to pass the reauthorization, which includes language regarding environmental health. Board members demonstrated NEHA's support of this bill by explaining to congressional staff that environmental health professionals are second responders in a crisis, describing their own experiences during different crisis situations. NEHA's Government Affairs program has requested the U.S. Senate pass the reauthorization as soon as possible. (*Editor's note:* As of press, the bill has passed both houses of Congress and has headed to the president for approval.)

For me, it was great to see the comradery among veteran and new board members with the shared goal of telling senators, representatives, and their staff why they are passionate about environmental health. NEHA Region 2 Vice-President Jacqueline Reszetar, who is serving her first term on NEHA's board, commented, "Hill Day was a priceless opportunity. The lobbying experience should be an educational requirement for all levels of environmental health professionals."



NEHA board members and staff thank Representative Brenda Lawrence (D-Michigan) [center] for her leadership and support of the Environmental Health Workforce Act of 2019. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.

As we put this important day to bed for another year, I am grateful for the support of our board and staff who took time to participate in the Third Annual Hill Day. NEHA's Government Affairs program looks forward to next year's event and in the meantime, will continue to provide a voice for the environmental health profession in Washington, DC.

Did You Know?

Early bird registration for the *Legionella* Conference 2019, hosted by NSF International and NEHA, ends **July 19**. The conference will be held September 11–13 in Los Angeles, California. The conference will focus on emerging issues related to building water systems and will bring professionals together to work toward solutions. To register or learn more, visit www.legionellaconference.org.

NEHA NEWS

NEHA Receives ecoAmerica Climate Leadership Award



The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) was honored to be one of nine recipients of the Climate Leadership Award (<https://ecoamerica.org/nine-organizations-receive-climate-leadership-awards-at-acls19/>) presented by ecoAmerica at the American Climate Leadership Summit 2019 in Washington, DC, May 1–2. The other honorees included the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church–Western Episcopal District, Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, American Public Health Association, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Climate Resolve, Physicians for Social Responsibility, United Church of Christ, and a multi-stakeholder effort with Salt Lake City, Park City, Summit County, Utah Climate Action Network, and Utah Clean Energy.

The award recognizes NEHA's commitment to work towards 100% clean energy by 2030, which was formalized in a declaration issued by NEHA in November 2018. The declaration is included below and can be viewed online at https://neha.org/sites/default/files/publications/position-papers/NEHA-Clean-Energy-By-2030-Declaration_0.pdf.

NEHA is grateful to ecoAmerica for the award and recognition.

NEHA Declaration on 100% Clean Energy by 2030

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) recognizes climate change as a worldwide environmental health challenge that detrimentally affects the health and safety of individuals and communities. Climate change alters our environmental health—the quality of air, food, and water in the communities where we live, work, and play. Environmental health professionals improve and protect the public's health and create and sustain healthy communities. Our responsibility is to build the capacity of environmental health professionals to address the health effects of climate change. We define climate change as any significant change in climate trends and measures lasting for an extended period of time, such as changes in temperature, precipitation, or wind patterns. Climate change poses an increased risk in changing sea levels, water temperatures, and water chemistry; coastal flooding and erosion; the expansion of the range of disease vectors; the geographic spread of tropical diseases to new areas; and prolonged droughts with associated effects on crops, water resources, and wildfires.

We are compelled to act because carbon pollution is warming our planet and profoundly affecting the U.S. and the world. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the surface temperature of the earth has risen at a rate of approximately 0.17 °C per decade since 1970. Increasing temperatures pose the greatest threat to the environment and human health due to impaired air quality and heat-related illnesses in vulnerable populations. The human, environmental, and economic costs of increasing droughts, floods, wildfires, extreme weather, and rising sea levels can be measured in lost lives, higher food prices, poorer health, and billions of dollars in disaster relief. Human activity contributes to these threats and humans can solve this challenge. We have an obligation to act today on climate change and build a sustainable future for our children. We can choose clean energy and use it efficiently. U.S. leadership can help the world meet these challenges with innovative solutions. We must start with mitigating our own climate impact.

Therefore, NEHA is committed to work towards 100% clean energy use by 2030. We will employ administrative, educational, engineering, and fiscal measures to meet this goal. These measures will:

Demonstrate Leadership: Environmental health professionals are influencers in their local communities and professional networks. They have a solemn responsibility to engage with federal, state, and local influencers to report on the needs of the communities they serve and to be the voice of their communities on all environmental health concerns.

Create a Positive Energy Future: Climate change solutions need to promote abundant clean energy, avoid costly carbon pollution, and provide choices in affordable energy. Solutions will help Americans save money by making homes, buildings, and transportation more energy efficient (e.g., to incorporate green space and other technologies into the built environment to help reduce urban heat island effects).

Improve People's Health: Solutions need to clean the air, improve land and water quality, and provide healthy food choices. They need to combat the devastating health effects of climate change and reduce mortality, injury, and illness associated with increased pulmonary diseases, extreme weather events, and increased vector populations.

Build Shared and Sustainable Prosperity: Climate solutions need to create American jobs and a sustainable economy that supports better lives and livelihoods today and for generations to come. They need to also ensure a just transition for communities negatively affected by America's shift to cleaner fuels.

Prepare for Harmful Effects: As we begin to reverse the climate crisis, restore the natural environment, and build a better future, we must protect families, communities, and livelihoods from the harmful effects we are already experiencing from climate change.

Involve All Americans: All of us must have a say in decisions that affect our lives. Special efforts should be made to include youth and vulnerable communities in crafting solutions and setting policy. 🐾