NEHA Is a Volunteer Organization

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Like most nongovernmental organizations, NEHA is a volunteer organization. As members we perform numerous functions for the organization as volunteers. Volunteers range from the board of directors (which includes the five elected officers and the nine regional vice presidents), to the affiliate presidents, technical advisors, peer reviewers and technical editors, past presidents, and numerous other committees and groups who perform various tasks or functions for NEHA. Many of us have been called upon to volunteer for some committee or work on some project, from developing the new Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) exam to deciding who our new executive director will be. As members we feel an obligation, and in most cases, a feeling of contribution to NEHA to ensure its continuation as the go-to organization for our profession.

All of us somehow found our way to NEHA; we believe we can contribute and encourage others to join and work with us to make NEHA the premier organization for environmental health. Many of us were elected by either the total membership, by our regional membership, by our state affiliate, or by being invited or asked by the president to be a technical advisor or to serve on some committee. Our members are volunteers in every sense of the word.

The board of directors has responsibilities that include financial and operational (as the executive director reports to the board). The board also is responsible for communicating with the membership. This year we have had the enormous task of finding a new executive director, which takes time and financial resources. Our task is nearing completion and we know NEHA will have the very best executive director to lead us into the 21st century. One of the board’s tasks related to this was a detailed review of NEHA and its operations. We found the NEHA staff to be a wonderful group of intelligent and hard-working individuals who perform their jobs, work with our members, interact with outside agencies, and maintain thousands of registrations in several areas of environmental health. Our job as board members is made easier by their dedication and loyalty to all of us who are members of NEHA.

Our affiliate presidents are the leaders on the ground and contribute so much to the membership with their activities during the year including their annual meetings and their attendance at NEHA’s Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition to give us an update on what is happening in the trenches. They are the foundation upon which NEHA was created and the state organizations in which we are individual members. We hope many of them will move up to regional vice presidents or officers of NEHA in the future.

Perhaps the groups we see or converse with frequently at NEHA’s AEC are the technical advisors. These volunteers are experts in their chosen field and give NEHA the ability to utilize their knowledge and expertise to assemble a slate of speakers for our AEC. They work with the NEHA staff to recruit speakers to present papers and posters and will moderate the educational sessions. Our educational sessions are some of the best presentations and posters with the latest information on a variety of subjects that are of vital interest to many members. After the AEC they will provide a written report to NEHA’s educational coordinator that summarizes the presentations, handouts, audiovisuals, and speakers’ technical and presentation skills.

Another group of volunteers that makes a big impact on NEHA are the Journal’s peer reviewers and technical editors. Without this large group of individuals the Journal would not be able to publish the high-quality and scientifically sound articles that it does. All articles submitted to the Journal for publication consideration are sent to two peer reviewers and one technical editor for review. The peer reviewers provide feedback on the
article's originality, validity, sound scientific methods, logical discussion, and appropriate conclusions. The technical editors then use the peer reviewer feedback and their own expertise to determine if a manuscript is ready for publication, if revisions are necessary, or if the manuscript does not meet the Journal's high standards for publication.

NEHA’s past presidents are a great resource for the president and current board members with their knowledge, expertise, and institutional memories. The past presidents committee has several functions, including selecting a person they believe has contributed to NEHA and served its members in an outstanding fashion by presenting them with the Past Presidents Award. It was a humbling experience to receive the Past Presidents Award in 2008. I was totally surprised and literally speechless. To me it is an award that has special meaning since it is given by former presidents, who are the keepers of NEHA tradition. Many of them are retired but still have an involvement in NEHA. You are never too old to volunteer so give it some thought and volunteer.

The list of volunteers could go on and on. Besides the ones that I’ve mentioned above, NEHA relies on volunteers to be subject-matter experts within its credentialing department to assist in keeping our credentials relevant. Volunteers also make the workshops NEHA offers possible through the donation of their time and expertise as trainers. Volunteers also help out at NEHA AECs at the registration desk and other places to assist the staff in making the conference a success to all in attendance.

It’s impossible to list all the volunteers, but each and every one should know how important they are to NEHA. On behalf of NEHA I thank all the volunteers who make a positive impact on the association and who give their time and expertise freely. NEHA is truly indebted to all these individuals. Thank you! And if you want to get involved and volunteer some time to NEHA, please let us know!

In closing this column, I want to assure you we have a new executive director in the wings ready to come on board in early May. I believe you will find this individual to be an excellent choice to continue the work of NEHA for which many of you have contributed a good part of your working lives as active members.

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