

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



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## AEC San Antonio: It Just Wouldn't Be the Same Without You

**T**he roads to our future converge in San Antonio and the possibilities stretch far into the horizon.

“What do attendees recall years after a conference has convened?” I inquired of a seasoned meeting planner. I was expecting the customary laundry list of good speakers, excellent training, and nice facilities. He smiled and responded, “Are you sure you want to know?” I replied in the affirmative. His answer was short and concise, “The food and professional networking opportunities.” While many of you might disagree, I was recently told pretty much the same thing from a group of young professionals who are advising me on the needs of the early- and mid-career workforce.

Our Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition scheduled this month (June 13–17) in San Antonio, Texas, will provide memorable food and professional networking sessions. Downtown San Antonio serves up virtually every possible dish at affordable prices with the Texas flare for which they are famous—all within easy walking distance of the conference. We are doing our part by replacing the traditional Presidents Banquet with a Texas Social as part of your registration. This new event will provide a taste of Texas. To ensure your event is memorable, we have booked local country music, the Bret Mullins Band, to make the sensory experience complete. This evening will be hosted by our own dynamic Laura Brister and will start around sunset in a beautiful outdoor plaza adjacent to the conference hotels.

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In addition to the Texas Social, extended coffee breaks have been strategically embedded throughout the conference to maximize the probability that you can meet and greet some of the major influencers that will be in attendance. Furthermore, I intend to host a social for students and young professionals to ensure there is a continuous thread from the emerging workforce to seasoned professionals.

Food and networking, we hear you loud and clear. But like the late-night TV commercials extoll, “That’s not all!”

Whether we recognize it or not, we are metaleaders. We generally have strong science backgrounds, are familiar with the regulated community, and largely live in local communities across this country and the U.S. territories. We need to leverage our strengths to work across disciplines and the 2016 AEC offers us such an opportunity. The U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will be colocating their conference with us, which will provide you an opportunity to attend their educational sessions and meet housing professionals in your region. Please take advantage of this mix of professionals.

The AEC will also provide learning opportunities that will be unlike any in recent history. First, the sessions will include some of the nation’s most important environmental health newsmakers. To that end, the opening session will be dominated by Washington, DC, policy influencers. Representatives from major organizations such as HUD, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and in the spirit of environmental health being profoundly local, Texas public health agencies. These change agents will examine the most urgent issues related to housing, infrastructure, and climate change. There will be microphones in the audience so attendees can tender a question to the panel. The aim is for you to have a highly interactive experience where you have control and influence through your questions and inquiries.

Dr. Marc Edwards, the researcher who broke the Flint, Michigan, story, will lead a session on water quality and public health. This session promises to shine a light on arguably the most important environmental health news story of the year, led by the person who made the news.

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Climate health issues will persist throughout our lives and will increasingly cast a shadow over society and our way of life. We intend to move the conversation toward solutions by having the most important public health influencers discuss the way forward for our profession. CDC's Dr. George Luber, George Mason University's Dr. Edward Maimbach, and representatives from the U.S. Government Accountability Office will tender their thoughts and take your questions.

This spring has been all things Zika. I have been to the White House to discuss our profession's role. Our own Christl Tate has convened Zika webinars this spring that have been well attended and positively evaluated by you. Our aim is to ensure you have the latest information from people on the front lines. To that end, Dr. Claudia Riegel, director of the New Orleans Mosquito, Termite, and Rodent Control Board, will be leading a session on Zika at the AEC.

Last July I promised you that the practice of environmental health would increasingly be a contact sport. I kept my end of the bargain, in part by hiring a government affairs professional, Joanne Zucher, who is based in Washington, DC. Zucher is the real deal and will anchor an AEC session on all things policy. Catch a glimpse of yourself and your potential contributions to the policy arena in the new NEHA. I plan on attending this session, notebook in hand.

San Bernardino. I am incapable of characterizing this event and what it has meant to my friends who work there and all of us collectively. We recognize that behavioral health issues affect our profession and will unpack this issue and examine it with the aim to foster hope and healing. Environmental health professionals who experienced the Southeast Asia Tsunami, the recent Ebola outbreak, Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, the World Trade Center attack, and yes, the San Bernardino attack, will participate in a closing session moderated by nationally

recognized mental health experts Jack Hermann and Dr. April Naturale. This session is sponsored by our Business and Industry Affiliate. No one should miss this session and I recommend you arrive early to secure a seat for what promises to be a moving and educational session.

One hundred eighty years ago, the Battle of the Alamo was fought in San Antonio. Next month we will convene in the shadow of the Alamo Mission. Today we honor those who fell there so many years ago, and those whose lives were lost in San Bernardino, by providing you a truly memorable AEC experience. I intend to prove my meeting planning friend wrong by serving up memorable food and social events and providing unparalleled interactive learning opportunities.

Interested? Learn more at [www.neha.org/aec](http://www.neha.org/aec). 🐻



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