

National Environmental Health Annual Conference Delegate Report

The 71st Annual Educational Conference of the National Environmental Health Association was held in Atlantic City, New Jersey June 18-21, 2007. Over 1500 attended the conference and exhibition. The keynote speaker was Dr. Wilfried Kreisel, recently retired Executive Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) who spoke on global warming and public health. He also received the Walter Snyder Award from NEHA and NSF International. There were 83 exhibitors in the exhibition and over 200 educational sessions on environmental health topics including bioterrorism, food safety, water and wastewater, bathing, injury prevention, emerging pathogens, EH leadership, children's environmental health issues, indoor air quality, institutional health and hazardous materials. There were several student research presentations and poster sessions. At least 20 members of the MEHA attended this year's conference

President Janet Phelps requested me to serve as the MEHA official representative to the House of Delegates at the conference. There were three primary meetings for delegates to attend. They included the Affiliate Presidents' meeting, the Council of Delegates Focus Groups and the House of Delegates annual business meeting.

At the Affiliate President's meeting the discussion focused on several areas including survey of affiliates on how state associations are staffed, marketing our invisible profession, and what affiliates are doing to grow their memberships. The Indiana Environmental Health Association conducted a study of state affiliates to see how many were using paid staff to administer specific responsibilities for their associations. California (\$12,000 from dues), Illinois (\$30,000 from Conferences), Indiana (\$6,700 from dues), Massachusetts (\$3,000 from BT grant), Texas (\$18,900 from dues and conferences), Washington (\$9,600 from dues and conferences), and West Virginia (\$600 from dues) have a paid position. Four states including Michigan did not respond to the survey. All other associations administer the association using volunteers. However the discussion demonstrated movement toward paying for services as volunteers and workload were increasing. They also conducted a dues survey as well. State Association active member dues range from a low of \$10.00 to a high of \$59.00. Sustaining member dues ranged from \$10.00 to \$275.00 with most around \$100.00. Student dues were typically half or a little less than half of the active member dues. A copy of the report is attached for your review.

There was also considerable discussion about our invisible profession including ideas and examples of what the Washington Affiliate was doing to market the profession. Washington has developed a series of posters on Environmental Health that are being used at schools, fairs, clinics, and in newspaper stories about what environmental health is and what it does for the community. They were very well done and represented certain events that happen throughout the day where environmental health is involved such as

assuring safe water for brushing teeth and showering, food service for meals, food borne illness investigation, nursing home inspections, pools, wastewater, solid waste etc. I would encourage you to review their newsletters. They provide excellent information and practical training for sanitarians. I am enclosing a copy for your review.

The third topic was a discussion of important issues facing Environmental Health. As you would expect, budget cuts, lack of qualified staff from accredited programs, salaries, lack of training, and lack of recognition were the topics of the day. Most states see increasing roles in training new employees as one of their functions.

At the Council of Delegate Focus Group meeting, the discussion focused on marketing our profession. Because of what we do, we are one of the few professions which when we succeed, we are virtually invisible. However, when we fail, everyone seems to know. Such is the destiny of a profession that works in prevention. This year's president, Rob Blake has made dealing with the invisible profession one of his central priorities. He would like to raise the profile and engage in the efforts needed to raise public awareness about who we are, what we do and what outcomes we produce. In addition CDC has funded an effort to better understand what we can do to more effectively market our profession. While only the initial work has been completed, many have hopes that this project will be continued and that CDC will join the fray to help promote our profession. The questions discussed included:

1. Does your focus group even agree that more efforts need to be undertaken to better market our profession
2. List the dangers that your group sees should more marketing on behalf of the profession not be undertaken.
3. What should the "brand" for environmental health be?
4. What are the key messages that you would like to see a marketing campaign built around and do you market differently to policy makers and the public?
5. Identify successful marketing projects and initiatives that have been undertaken for environmental health
6. What would you like to see in the way of marketing efforts on behalf of Environmental Health? What should NEHA do? State affiliates? Local health departments?

The results of all of the focus groups will be compiled by NEHA and presented in an upcoming article in the Journal.

At the annual House of Delegate meeting most of the topics were informational items from NEHA. Some highlights include:

1. Michigan (226) is the third largest affiliate behind California (469) and Texas (241). Virginia is fourth (224) and Massachusetts (212).
2. Mel Knight from California is the only candidate for Second Vice President and will be unopposed during the spring ballot. (The Michigan Affiliate hosted a meet the candidate session again this year and met Mel and discussed

- his ideas. The Michigan delegation solidly supports Mel Knight in his bid for election.
3. Discussion on NEHA's governmental affairs and external liaison program.
 4. NEHA's strategic direction. The focus is:
 - a. training and education
 - i. Terrorism and emergency response
 - ii. Expand educational offerings by NEHA including consideration of satellite conferences
 - b. credentialing
 - i. Strengthening the stature for the REHS/RS credential and encourage more states to use the NEHA national test.. This also includes a movement on NEHA's part to establish a more national, uniform standard for competence in environmental health.
 - c. Advocacy
 - i. Increase awareness and appreciation of environmental health profession
 - ii. Create capability to stay on top of emerging issues such as SARS, West Nile, pandemic flue and emerging pathogens and provide information to members to its members.
 - iii. A stronger program for leadership development needs to be worked on and implemented within the profession.
 - iv. Define its niche in the international community and what its desires are for international environmental health are
 - v. NEHA should be instrumental in defining the practice of Environmental Health.
 - vi. NEHA should become the accrediting organization for local Environmental Health programs.
 - d. Organizational capacity
 - i. Strengthen NEHA financially and take advantage of financial opportunities
 - ii. Enhance NEHA's website to make it user friendly, creating a members only section and giving access to NEHA's database.
 - iii. Development of relationships with governmental agencies and other NGOs.
 - iv. Maintain NEHA's computer systems at the optimum level to provide necessary services to members and staff
 5. Promoted the NEHA awards including the Mangold Award, Walter Snyder Award, NEHA scholarship and sabbatical awards, and NEHA special recognition award to affiliate honorees.
 6. Allowing a column in the affiliate newsletters for NEHA Regional Vice President's report on NEHA activities.
 7. NEHA issue positions
 - a. National Food Uniformity Act. (NEHA along with AFDO opposed this legislation

- b. Support for US Conference of Mayors Position on Sustainability (NEHA supported the policies and the support will be communicated to Congress and the US Conference of Mayors)
 - c. Position on anticipated changes to FDA regional offices. NEHA opposed this reorganization because it would dilute scarce program resources, cause a loss of uniformity in application of retail food standards, and further fracture scarce personnel and budgetary resources impacting state and local jurisdictions enrolled in the National Retail Food Regulatory Program.
 - d. CDC Terminology for Environmental Public Health. NEHA will engage CDC in a discussion that would lead to a revision to address what appears to be an unintended effect of minimizing the importance of environmental health.
 - e. Position on food cloning and consumer right to know. NEHA supports new legislation to require product labeling with respect to cloning.
 - f. Proposal for a New National Food Agency. Based in part on a member survey indicating 74% support among NEHA members, NEHA board supports this legislation.
 - g. G. CDC Funding Support Initiative. NEHA Board took a position against the President's proposed cut in budget for CDC to both the House and Senate. Both houses rejected the President's initiative.
 - h. Healthy Places Legislation. NEHA board supported this legislation. However, it sits with the House Energy and Commerce sub-committee on Health. No further action has been taken on this bill.
 - i. Sending complimentary journals to policy makers. NEHA is considering sending complimentary journals to Directors of all state health departments and environmental agencies, appropriate public health, environmental health and environmental protection committees in state legislatures, heads of agencies such as EPA, FDA, Homeland Security, Dept. of Agriculture, CDC and Dept of Energy, heads of appropriate committees of Congress, and the governors of each state.
8. Future NEHA Conferences:
- a. 2008 – Tucson, AZ
 - b. 2009 – Atlanta, GA
 - c. 2010 – Hawaii, St Louis, or Albuquerque NM
 - d. 2011 – Michigan? Do we want to submit our nomination. It will be in the Midwest. Michigan can be considered, along with Indianapolis. I will brief the board on my discussion with Nelson Fabian and propose a site for consideration.
9. Awards
- a. Mangold Award – Chris Wiant, Colorado
 - b. Snyder Award – Wilfried Kreisel, WHO
 - c. National Certificate of Merit Award – John Gohlke
 - d. Past President's Award – Robert Harrington, Wyoming

- e. American Academy of Sanitarian Davis Calvin Wagner Award – Harry Grenawitzke
- f. Scholarship Award – Kimberley M. Johnson Award – Boise State University
- g. Sabbatical Exchange Award – Dixie Fullerton, Cerro Gordo County Dept of Health, Iowa.

I would be pleased to discuss details of any of the topics with any member of NEHA.

Respectfully submitted,

Harry Grenawitzke, RS, MPH, DAAS
Michigan Affiliate Delegate