

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



David Dyjack, DrPH, CIH

## Tabula Rasa, Solarium Argentums, and Carpe Diem, Baby

I'm on the intercity train from Lisbon, my favorite city in the planet, headed to Coimbra, the site of the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH) conference. No, this is not the fastest train, and there are frequent stops along the way, with many beautiful little towns such as Vila Franca de Xira, where I happen to be at the moment. Trips like this provide an opportunity to reflect and put things in perspective, a privilege too good to pass up for purposes of this column.

At the time of this writing, I've been on the job at NEHA for almost five months, and have listened and learned. On most days I feel like I have returned to the University of Utah Rocky Mountain Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, trying to keep up with the second year graduate students. Which leads me to *tabula rasa*, Latin for "clean slate," the fresh approach I employed when I entered grad school. Likewise, we are taking a clean and new approach to everything your association is doing. Let me explain, starting with our Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition.

For the 2016 AEC we are partnering with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in San Antonio. This translates to approximately 400 additional attendees, perhaps more, and many learning and networking opportunities with our colleagues who are vested in the built environment. The conference will begin late on a Monday afternoon, which will allow you to spend the weekend with your families before departing for the conference. In the same

*We are taking a  
clean and new  
approach to  
everything your  
association is doing.*

spirit, we will end the conference on Thursday around 1:00, which should get you home the same evening.

The conference itself will be laser focused on education and networking, with much less emphasis on association pomp and circumstance. The opening session will be anchored by a keynote and panel session with an "A-list" of participants. Individual sessions will largely forgo the historic "talking heads" as we introduce more interactive high-energy workshops. Some examples are debates, ignite sessions, and sessions developed by millennials. Also expect less stuff to lug around as we explore going largely paperless through deployment of our conference application (i.e., mobile app).

We also recognize that you travel to conferences to build and enhance your professional network. There will be ample and extended coffee breaks built into the program to achieve your aim. We plan to sunset the traditional banquet on the last day and introduce a social

event the night before the conference ends so everyone can participate. There are abundant eateries at every possible price point within walking distance of the conference events. You can be assured we will take this approach for AECs from this point forward.

We will also be more student friendly at the AEC. We have extended the student abstract submission process until May 2016 to accommodate student paper and poster submissions. Also effective in 2016, there will be a stand-alone AEC student poster session. We are also doing away with the caste system where students have limited access to events—the student registration rate will treat them as full professionals to include all activities. This is not your grandparents' NEHA.

Our changes are not limited to the AEC. We have embarked on the planning process to bring our credentialing into the paperless era. That's right, digitizing everything so there are no more copies to send through snail mail. The same is true for our internal accounting processes; we are reviewing how we can do our work sustainably without compromising on quality or accountability. We desire to walk the environmental health and sustainability talk.

*Solarium argentums* refers to the Roman practice of paying its soldiers in bars of salt, because it was prized and essential to health. In the same manner, I consider it a strategic imperative to uncover and liberate latent talent among our three dozen employees. We are rapidly moving into an era where an engaged, enabled, and empowered workforce

*continued on page 60*

**President's Message**  
*continued from page 7*

**What Can NEHA Affiliates and Individual Members Do to Support NEHA's International Work?**

There is an increasing number of international opportunities for NEHA members and affiliates. Here are a few:

- Volunteer to be a NEHA Ambassador. NEHA is looking for ambassadors to the Middle East, Asia, Mexico and Central America, and South America. For more information e-mail me at NEHA.Prez@comcast.net.
- If you have gently used environmental health books, equipment, or laptops that are not too outdated, you can donate these to GEHP. You can contact them at GEHP@comcast.net.

- Apply for an international sabbatical exchange in the United Kingdom or Canada. Details on how to apply can be found at [www.neha.org/sabbatical-exchange-program](http://www.neha.org/sabbatical-exchange-program).
- Volunteer for a short-term mission with one of the many humanitarian organizations doing work in the developing world. Several places to search for opportunities can be found at
  - » [www.idealists.org/info/Volunteer/Resources/Travel](http://www.idealists.org/info/Volunteer/Resources/Travel),
  - » [www.goodnet.org/articles/397](http://www.goodnet.org/articles/397),
  - » [www.habitat.org/getinv/volunteer\\_programs.aspx](http://www.habitat.org/getinv/volunteer_programs.aspx),
  - » [www.water.cc](http://www.water.cc), or
  - » [www.missionfinder.org](http://www.missionfinder.org).
 A volunteer experience in the developing world will give you new insights on environmental health.

- Beginning in 2016, NEHA will encourage its affiliates to pair themselves with an environmental health association in the developing world. NEHA believes that even small investments in information sharing, training, mentoring, or donation of used books or equipment can have a major impact in these developing countries. We also believe that these relationships will enrich the practice of environmental health practitioners here in the U.S.

Environmental health has no borders. NEHA recognizes that and is increasingly connecting environmental health practitioners in the U.S. with their peers across the globe. As Walt Disney said, "It's a small world after all." 🐻

*Bob Custard*

NEHA.Prez@comcast.net

**DirectTalk**

*continued from page 62*

promises to bring dividends to our member-centered organization. None of us is as smart as all of us, and we are creating the internal conditions where the best ideas float, independent of who offered up the gem. Our aim over time is for you to trust our capabilities, and more importantly, to trust our organizational character. If we can achieve that, then nothing else matters. If we can't, then nothing else matters. I mean it.

Relationships and trust are built on four basic factors: the proximity of the key players, the frequency of their interaction, the duration of their time together, and finally,

the intensity of the processes. As we travel our professional journey together I will keep these factors in mind as we recognize that our success as an organization is primarily predicated on your success as individual practitioners, as we strengthen the systems that ensure a safe and healthy environment.

I am struck that we have many battles ahead of us. Dr. Katherine Kirkland, executive director of the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics, spoke to our staff a couple of months ago in Denver. She reflected on the impending budget battle on Capitol Hill, with increasingly common terms "sequester," "continuing resolution," and other evidence of political gridlock in full

evidence. Sadly, it is becoming increasingly evident that these battles will be with us for the duration of our working lifetimes. We will need to consider the four trust factors I mentioned earlier to cultivate relationships with the influencers on Capitol Hill. This will not be an inexpensive or easy proposition in our journey to success. It is nonetheless necessary.

Speaking of journey, the conductor just announced our impending arrival into Coimbra. With that, I bid you a blessed holiday season. Carpe diem. 🐻

*Dave*

ddyjack@neha.org  
Twitter: @DTDyjack

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

ADVANCE YOUR CAREER WITH A CREDENTIAL

Learn more at [neha.org/credential](http://neha.org/credential)



Environmental Health Specialist: REHS/RS



Food Safety: CP-FS and CCFS



Healthy Homes: HHS



Environmental Technician: CEHT



Onsite Wastewater: CIOWTS


