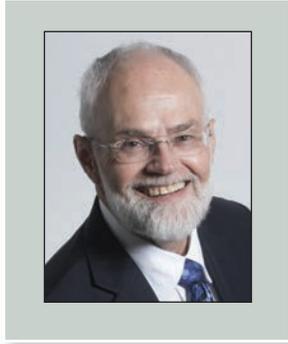


► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Vince Radke, MPH, RS,
CP-FS, DLAAS, CPH

My Heroes

This past October I had the privilege to attend two National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) affiliate conferences—the Iowa Environmental Health Association (IEHA) Fall Conference and the Alaska Environmental Health Association (AEHA) Annual Educational Conference. In attendance with me at the IEHA conference were Region 4 Vice-President Kim Carlton and Region 7 Vice-President Tim Hatch. Both gave presentations and represented NEHA well. Carlton gave an update on NEHA and Hatch spoke on emergency preparedness and response to the 2017 hurricanes. At the AEHA conference, Region 1 Vice-President Matthew Reighter gave two presentations. One of the presentations was an update on NEHA and the other was on the prevention of foodborne illness.

Both conferences were well attended. In Alaska, a moose showed up just outside our conference room windows (Photo 1). The quality of presentations was excellent. What was most impressive was the diversity and quality of work being done by local sanitarians/environmental health specialists. They were doing this work in collaboration with various partners (e.g., state agencies, industry, nongovernmental organizations, and others).

IEHA was starting a yearlong celebration of its 50th anniversary. I gave IEHA President Don Simmons a small gift on behalf of NEHA's board of directors (Photo 2). The Iowa conference started with a presentation by Bruce Clark, Marler Clark, The Food Safety Law Firm, on foodborne illness litigation and the burden and impact of foodborne illness suffered by individuals and their families.



Photo 1. An unexpected attendee of the Alaska Environmental Health Association's Annual Educational Conference. Photo courtesy of Vince Radke.

The Iowa conference had multiple presentations during each of the breakout sessions. Based on the program abstracts, it was difficult to decide which presentations to attend. They all sounded good. I attended a presentation titled "It Take a Village: How to Improve Your Environmental Health Program by Collaborating With Other Environmental Health Agencies Through Regional Meetings and Inter-agency Agreements." The presentation was given by two environmental health specialists from neighboring counties who demonstrated the power of partnerships in addressing environmental health issues in the region.

Another presentation showed the importance of partnership and collaboration between environmental health at a county public health department and the Iowa State Hygienic Laboratory to resolve issues around contamination of private wells (e.g., bacteria, nitrate, arsenic, neonicotinoid insecticides, and others). Another session highlighted the

importance of data from the well log for environmental health specialist. These data, along with laboratory data, can help well drillers and environmental health specialists who are working together to determine possible well water contamination sources and to take the necessary action to correct the problem.

A session about the Iowa Onsite Waste Water Association's Homeowner Onsite System Record Keeping Folder showed the importance of having information available to quickly respond to issues with septic systems to septic system owners, contractors, and pumpers. Also, the speaker pointed out how grant money to the counties can be used to pay for this resource. Other sessions I attended provided information on a community water fluoridation program, a nuisance program, and a lead poisoning program that is a partnership between the Iowa Department of Public Health and Linn County Public Health. I was so proud of all the good work that environmental health specialists, along with their partners, are doing in their communities in Iowa. My heartfelt thanks to all of them.

At the AEHA conference I got a sense of the difficulty environmental health specialists face in Alaska. The distances they must travel, either by boat or plane because roads do not lead to many villages and small communities, make their jobs tough. There were sessions on air monitoring in Bethel, Alaska, and confined space entry if environmental health specialists were involved. The session on confined space entry spoke about the training, monitoring, and safety procedures



Photo 2. National Environmental Health Association President Vince Radke congratulates Iowa Environmental Health Association (IEHA) President Don Simmons on IEHA's 50th anniversary. Photo courtesy of Carmily Stone.



Photo 3. Vince Radke (far left) and Matthew Reighter (far right) stand with officers from the Alaska Environmental Health Association before the closing dinner and award ceremony commences. Photo courtesy of Vince Radke.

that are required before environmental health specialists can enter a confined space.

There was a session on One Health that demonstrated the importance of environmental health specialists in the areas of food safety, animal health, and zoonotic diseases. The speaker pointed out the importance of environmental health specialists working with epidemiologists, public health nurses, and public health laboratories to control disease. There was a session about new tools for those working in institutional environmental health, as well as a session on using technology and social media to increase public awareness and reporting of foodborne illness in Alaska.

Given the changing climate in Alaska, there was a discussion on the risk of ticks and tickborne pathogens in Alaska going forward. There were two other sessions that deserve mention. The first was a talk given

by Dr. Jay Butler, director of the Division of Public Health at the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, on the perspectives of communicating complex health topics like environment health issues. The other was an update on the Alaska Pacific University (APU) Environmental Health Program and the effort between AEHA and APU to establish an environmental health program at the university. This multiyear effort is moving forward. It is the hope that APU and students in Alaska will have an academic environmental health program in the next year or so.

Finally, I attended the AEHA dinner and awards ceremony on my last night in Alaska (Photo 3). It was a wonderful moment for me to see the joy and pride of those being recognized for their great work under harsh conditions.

In closing out the evening, I was sitting with three young environmental health spe-

cialists over a beer sharing environmental health war stories. They mentioned that part of their jobs was to fly to remote villages in Alaska in support of improving the health of people in the villages. One of their jobs was to vaccinate family dogs against rabies. One of the hazards of that job is dog bites; they take the necessary precautions but occasional they get bit. I was concerned and told them so. They laughed and said it was part of their job and not a big deal. They showed me their scars. We finished our beers, said good night, and headed back to the hotel.

Before falling asleep that evening, I thought about the environmental health specialists in Iowa, Alaska, and across the U.S.—my heroes!



Vince _____
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