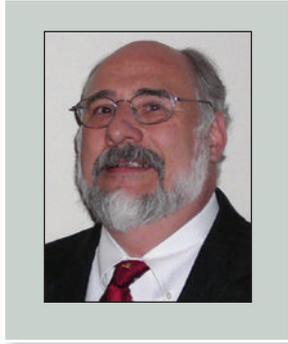


► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Bob Custard,
REHS, CP-FS

NEHA Goes to Washington

Astronaut Jim Lovell, commander of the Apollo 13 space mission, once famously said, "There are people who make things happen, there are people who watch things happen, and there are people who wonder what happened. To be successful, you need to be a person who makes things happen." I believe the same applies to organizations. To be successful, NEHA needs to be an organization that makes things happen.

For years, NEHA's members have called for us to expand our influence in Washington, DC, so that we can be more effective advocates for environmental health and the environmental health profession. Whether we like it or not, Washington, DC, is where people and organizations of influence make things happen on a national level.

New Senior NEHA Staff Members Assigned to DC

In January, we announced a major step with the appointment of two new senior staff members who will be stationed in the Washington, DC, area. This is the beginning of a new initiative by NEHA to truly make things happen for us in the national arena.

Sandra Whitehead, PhD, has been hired to lead NEHA's team that works on our grants and contracts with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal agencies. Whitehead comes to us from the National Association of County and City Health Officials, where she served as the senior director of community health promotion, overseeing the healthy community design and chronic disease prevention portfolios. Previously she worked with the

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Florida Department of Health as the state-wide resource on health impact assessment, Health in All Policies, and healthy homes.

Joanne Zurcher, MPP, fills the newly created role of director of government affairs. Zurcher will coordinate our advocacy efforts and help members more effectively educate their federal legislators and officials on environmental health issues. She has more than 20 years of government affairs and legislative experience in both private and government settings. During the debate on the Affordable Care Act, Zurcher worked for the Health Resources and Services Administration as acting director of the Office of Legislation. Previously she served as the director of legislative affairs for Americans for the United Nations Populations Fund and held senior positions with several members of Congress.

Why It's Important for NEHA to Open an Office in DC

Federal priorities, policies, regulations, and budgets are framed in Washington, DC. These decisions affect the work of every environmental health professional in both the public and private sectors. In order for us to have an influence on federal priorities, policies, regulations, and budgets, we must consistently be at the table as a key stakeholder. It is difficult to do this from 1,600 miles away in Denver.

Virtually every national organization with a stake in public health or environmental issues has a presence in Washington, DC. These organizations are able to respond to fast moving issues and quickly exploit windows of opportunity that organizations located outside Washington, DC, may not even be aware of. Many collaborative meetings between key stakeholders happen with only hours of notice. In order to be a serious player in helping frame federal priorities, policies, regulations, and budgets, we have to have a presence in Washington, DC.

Environmental health often deals with crosscutting issues affecting both public health and the environment. This is especially true on issues currently in the news such as water quality (lead in drinking water) and vector control (Zika virus, dengue, and chikungunya). NEHA is in a position to assume a leadership role in pulling together stakeholders to work collaboratively across disciplines on these types of issues if, through a Washington, DC, office, we can build a strong network of partners.

Why a DC Presence Is Especially Important Now

2016 is a federal election year. In less than a year there will be a change in administrations. Even if there is not a change in the political party in the White House, priorities and policies are likely to change for the first time in eight years. It is especially important for us to be at the table as these new priorities and policies are framed as they will likely set the agenda for the next four to eight years.

Further, in the heat of a presidential election, it is unlikely that Congress will agree on a budget this year. It is more likely that Congress will pass a continuing resolution and then present a fresh budget for adoption in the early spring of next year under a new administration. Under this scenario, this year's budget proposals will likely be considered for implementation in a 2017 budget bill as there will not be time between the inau-

guration on January 20 and early spring to craft many new proposals. 2016 is a year that being at the table in Washington, DC, will be especially important.

How Will NEHA's Operation in DC Evolve Over Time?

We hope to secure office space in Washington, DC, perhaps initially co-locating with another public health or environmental organization. As NEHA expands, more staff will likely be stationed in Washington, DC. (NEHA's current Denver office is at capacity.) Eventually we will likely have an office space of our own in the Washington, DC, area.

As NEHA's operations in Washington, DC, ramp up, expect that we will

- increase our collaboration with other public health and environmental organizations on national policy issues affecting environmental health,

- increase our contact with top policy makers in key federal agencies,
- begin playing coordinating and leading roles in bringing together diverse stakeholders on environmental health issues, and
- coordinate "Hill Days" for NEHA members to visit their federal representatives and educate them on environmental health issues.

These are exciting times for us as NEHA members. As an organization we are aggressively moving to become an organization that makes things happen on the national level. The establishment of a permanent NEHA presence in Washington, DC, is a huge step in that direction. 🐘

Bob Custard

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Did You Know?

The NEHA 2016 AEC and HUD Healthy Homes Conference, with presenting sponsor Green & Healthy Homes Initiative, is an excellent opportunity for attendees to advance their careers, network with other professionals, and enjoy social events that turn this conference into a memorable experience! Register before April 15 for early pricing at www.neha.org/aec. Be sure to check out the educational tracks offered at the conference online and start building your schedule at www.neha.org/aec/sessions.

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