

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Bob Custard,
REHS, CP-FS

Giant Steps Forward

A year ago, as we welcomed our new Executive Director Dr. David Dyjack, we knew we had found someone special to lead NEHA into the future. We certainly have not been disappointed. Over the past year we have taken giant steps forward. Here is my David Letterman-style “Top 10 List” of NEHA accomplishments over the last year.

10. While our mission is not about making money, financial stability assures that we can fulfill our mission now and for years to come. (As Dr. Dyjack often says, “We have to do well in order to do good.”) After having a disastrous year financially in fiscal year 2014 (FY14), NEHA squeaked out a tiny net surplus in FY15 and, as of this writing, we are on track to end FY16 in the black. Our staff and the Finance Committee have done a good job of improving our financial management.
9. We have significantly increased our global engagement. We have appointed seven ambassadors to various regions of the world to build our international relationships. We are regularly participating in events sponsored by the International Federation of Environmental Health. We have also specifically worked to enhance our relationship with counterpart organizations in Canada, Jamaica, and Australia. Included in this effort was the donation of four used laptops and about 50 books to our colleagues in Jamaica. As one of a consortium of six organizations, we submitted a proposal to the United Nations to be the select partner on environmental health

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issues related to disasters under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

8. Under the leadership of Shelly Wallingford, retail quality assurance manager for Starbucks, a new Business and Industry Affiliate was formed. This endeavor reflects our renewed commitment to be more inclusive of industry and to meet their professional needs. A growing proportion of environmental health professionals are working as consultants, quality assurance or food safety professionals with large companies, or technical specialists in industrial settings.
7. We have made great strides in improving outreach to and opportunities for students. This year, Dr. Dyjack and I visited environmental health programs at universities around the country to meet students and faculty, and to build stronger relationships between NEHA and academia. Student registration fees for the Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition now include access to all functions that come with regular registration. Abstract

deadlines for presentations by students have been extended to much later in the spring. A student poster session at the AEC is being planned. There will also be a special “meet and greet” reception for students at the AEC.

6. This year the board of directors created an Affiliate Engagement Committee and charged it with strengthening the ties between NEHA and our affiliates. The committee has developed a quarterly NEHA newsletter that is provided to affiliates to insert into their regular newsletters. The committee has also developed a special workshop for affiliate officers to be held at this year's AEC. The workshop will feature speakers on volunteer recruitment, recognition and retention, conference planning strategies, nonprofit risk management, and legal advice on nonprofit board fiduciary duties.
5. Under the leadership of our staff, Eric Fife and Rance Baker, we were awarded a \$5 million, five-year Food and Drug Administration cooperative agreement grant to provide training to state, local, territorial, and tribal food safety officials. The goal of the grant is to provide regulators more access to training as part of an integrated food safety system. Our association will maintain training records for course participants and instructors, and issue course certificates to those who successfully complete training. This contract will expand our distance learning capabilities and complements our other initiatives in food safety.
4. This year we significantly redesigned our AEC. The conference will be held in

conjunction with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Healthy Homes Conference, which should bring a diverse mix of participants that will add new perspectives to the AEC. The conference will be held over four days instead of three, with the first day beginning in the late afternoon and the last day ending in the early afternoon. Presentations will be more interactive. Extended coffee breaks have been added to the daily schedule. The opening and closing plenary sessions will be shorter and will feature top notch speakers. The closing Presidents Banquet will be replaced by a less formal event, a Texas Social featuring a barbeque dinner and country western music at a cool off-site location.

3. We are enhancing our digital footprint. Last summer we rolled out a new Web site. It is a vast improvement over the previous one. We are using the Internet to provide distance education, link environmental health professionals via social media, and distribute publications and information. We also are continuing to work to improve our e-commerce platform.
2. This year we opened an office in Washington, DC. A Washington presence is key to being an effective advocate for environmental health and the environmental health

profession. Dr. Sandra Whitehead, director of program and partnership development, and Joanne Zurcher, director of government affairs, were the first two staff members hired for our Washington office. Others will follow as our Washington-based programs grow. In its first months, our staff in Washington began educating federal legislators on the importance of vector control programs in preventing the spread of the Zika virus and the importance of trained and credentialed environmental health professionals in preventing crises such as the issue in Flint, Michigan, involving drinking water. They also emphasized the importance of continued funding for environmental health programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention such as the Safe Water Program, National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network, Built Environment and Health Initiative, and Climate and Health Program.

1. And our number one accomplishment this year was (drum roll please)—we have come through our first major leadership transition in over 30 years with flying colors. We are stronger than ever and moving forward to embrace and mold the future. With forward-looking leadership, we are poised to tackle future challenges

and seize new opportunities. We can all be proud of the giant steps forward our association is taking on our behalf.

In closing, let me express what a great honor it has been to serve as your president. Over the past year I have met many of you at universities that teach environmental health or at one of the 17 state environmental health association conferences at which you invited me to speak. Environmental health professionals are truly unsung heroes. I am both proud and humbled to be counted as one of you.

No leader succeeds individually; it is always a team effort. I would like to thank the many people who have helped make the past year so fruitful for our association:

- Executive Director Dr. David Dyjack,
- our incredible staff,
- our board of directors,
- our technical advisors,
- our subject matter experts,
- our ambassadors,
- our Council to Improve Foodborne Outbreak Response representatives, and
- many others!

Without them we could not have taken such giant steps forward. 🐻

Bob Custard

NEHA.Prez@comcast.net

Did You Know?

The NEHA 2017 AEC will be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in July. We'll keep you posted with exact dates and details at www.neha.org/aec, or connect with us on social media. Find NEHA on Twitter (@neha.org), LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/company/national-environmental-health-association), or Facebook (www.facebook.com/neha.org).

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