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Local Action, National Impact

Editor's Note: The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) strives to provide up-to-date and relevant information on environmental health and to build partnerships in the profession. In pursuit of these goals, we feature this column from ecoAmerica whose mission is to build public support and political resolve for climate solutions. NEHA is an official partner of ecoAmerica and works closely with their Climate for Health Program, a coalition of health leaders committed to caring for our climate to care for our health. The conclusions in this column are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of NEHA.

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Environmental health professionals across the U.S. are working to provide healthier, safer conditions for their stakeholders. Hospitals, retail outlets, restaurants, and technology companies all benefit from the monitoring, enforcement, and compliance carried out by environmental health professionals on a daily basis. Environmental health professionals embedded in local health departments keep our communities safe. At the American Climate Leadership Summit 2021, Dr. David Dyjack, executive director of the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), called environmental health specialists a small army of guardian angels (ecoAmerica, 2021a). The healthy environments they build locally lead to healthier people everywhere.

The impacts of effective environmental health initiatives are often meaningful and bring benefits to their organizations and

communities. Yet, these benefits are often unrecognized by their beneficiaries and are rarely shared with broader audiences. Greater promotion of these actions and their benefits can bolster environmental health initiatives within and beyond any one organization and serve as helpful examples for other communities and organizations.

Well designed, implemented, and communicated initiatives can be like a pebble in a pond. They can ripple out to affect initiatives by other environmental health professionals, organizations, and communities, ultimately leading to national impact. All environmental health professionals can amplify their impact by broadening their perspectives and outreach.

From a recent presentation of ecoAmerica's *Let's Talk Climate* webcast series, held at the NEHA 2021 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition, Dr. Natasha DeJarnett, assistant professor at the University of Louisville, stated:

Let us stop being invisible. Let us engage in storytelling and share our successes more, where we avoided water contamination, where we prevented an outbreak through restaurant safety practices. Let us showcase those things that were prevented because of the great work that we have done (ecoAmerica, 2021b, 52:25).

Environmental health professionals in communities and organizations around the country steadily innovate in a myriad of ways. In just the last few issues of the *Journal of Environmental Health* there are studies covering carbon monoxide poisoning from recreational watercraft, COVID-19 outbreaks in meatpacking plants, and radium in well water. Even in broader issues, such as climate change, they are making meaningful differences. Here are a few examples:

- In San Diego, county supervisors approved the inclusion of a new environmental justice element in their general plan, which is the county's constitution for development. It includes items at the core of environmental injustice such as disproportionate siting of polluting facilities in Black and Hispanic communities. They include environmental justice in planning and zoning processes as one step to alleviating the unequal burden of pollution.
- In Ohio, Franklin County Public Health created the position of sustainability supervisor, which would have responsibility for climate and health initiatives. Creating leadership roles within health departments that directly address environmental health and specifically address climate change is critical in helping residents better understand climate and

health connections, as well as build confidence in solutions.

- The city of Boston is leading a municipal electricity aggregation program, Community Choice Electricity, using their collective purchasing power to invest in clean energy for city residents. The Boston Public Health Commission was part of the stakeholder engagement process to implement this initiative. Engaging in the stakeholder process gave the Boston Public Health Commission the opportunity to hear and help their constituency understand local climate impacts on their health and detail clean energy as a health initiative.

Each of these examples has major implications for our health and our climate, and many of the methods and solutions are replicable in communities and organizations everywhere. We just need to spread the word. Marketing and communications are not part of the core environmental health curriculum, but they should be a part of all our work. When you deliberately and officially share the projects you are leading and working on with others, it spreads the benefits. Your initiatives could be

equally successful elsewhere, further increasing benefits and improving health outcomes.

The American Climate Leadership Awards program spreads the word on effective climate action through replication guides. The 10 finalists, all of which have connections to local communities, write a replication guide as the final step in choosing the winner and runner up (ecoAmerica, 2021c). Three threads typically appear in all the successful narratives:

1. Get started now. Delay impedes action and slows momentum.
2. Engage your community in solutions, including marginalized voices.
3. Amplify your work. Each initiative learns from and engages others.

We have the solutions we need now for climate change and most environmental health issues. We just need to get started. Have conversations with your leaders and colleagues. Make sure your community is invested in the solution and listen to their ideas for a healthier future. Make sure your peers in other states and localities know about your successes and obstacles. Amplifying your

work is how we scale-up and accelerate success. The projects and on-the-ground work are what make a difference in people's lives and when we talk about it, we also encourage others to take action. 🐛

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