

NEHA NEWS

NEHA Government Affairs Updates

By Doug Farquhar (dfarquhar@neha.org)

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) Government Affairs program has continued to represent and advocate for environmental health professionals over the summer months. Below is a list of our recent activities. You can also visit the Government Affairs webpage at www.neha.org/government-affairs to access NEHA-approved policy statements, letters and sign-ons, the Your Insider in Government Affairs Blog, and other information about our activities to inform policy makers on the importance of a well-supported and well-funded environmental health workforce.

Enacted State Legislation on Food Safety, Drinking Water, and Climate Change

NEHA has been tracking state legislation for the 2021–2022 session related to food safety, drinking water, and climate change. We have put together summaries of this legislation that are now posted at www.neha.org/government-affairs/neha-legislative-actions.

Food Safety

State legislators were active in the food safety arena. Legislators introduced 348 bills related to food safety with 69 bills enacted into law as of July 2022. Most every state legislature introduced bills related to food and food safety, and legislatures in 38 states introduced food safety legislation. California and New York enacted the most bills.

The foremost food safety issues in the legislation were related to retail foods, meat and cell-based meat, and food freedom. Other popular issues included food safety, nutrition, restaurant and food facilities, food deserts, and mobile food trucks. The full report can be viewed at www.neha.org/sites/default/files/2022-Food-Safety-Legislation.pdf.

Drinking Water

State legislatures introduced 2,081 bills related to drinking water during the 2021–2022 legislative sessions. We tracked 265 bills on drinking water and of those bills, 41 were enacted into law as of July 2022. California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York introduced the most drinking water legislation with more than 40 bills a piece, followed by Florida and Minnesota with more than 30 bills. On the other hand, Alaska, Montana, Nevada, South Dakota, Washington, DC, and Wyoming did not introduce any legislation related to drinking water.

California enacted the most legislation, merging several different bills into larger omnibus legislation. New York and Virginia each passed several bills on drinking water. Most states enacted only one or two bills, if they enacted any at all. The foremost issues were the financing of drinking water programs, water testing, private wells, regulation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in water, and regulation and removal of lead service lines. The full report can be viewed at www.neha.org/sites/default/files/2022-Drinking-Water-Legislation.pdf.

Climate Change

Over 4,200 bills listing climate change, greenhouse gas, or sequestration were introduced in the 50 state legislatures and Washington, DC, during the 2021–2022 session. Of these, we tracked 190 bills that had the most relevance to climate and health. As of July 2022, 86 bills were enacted in 25 states and Washington, DC.

California enacted the most bills with 19 bills enacted to date. The legislature in Maine enacted 13 bills, Hawaii enacted 8 bills, Rhode Island enacted 6 bills, and Washington enacted 8 bills. Read the full report at www.neha.org/sites/default/files/2022-Climate-Change-Legislation.pdf.

New NEHA Policy Statement

Over the years NEHA has researched and carefully crafted a series of policy statements in response to concerns from the environmental health professional. These statements include topics on body art, food safety, vector control, well water quality testing, mosquito control, the role of environmental health in emergency preparedness, and more. These statements are vetted by NEHA and adopted by the NEHA Board of Directors as official statements of the association. These statements set forth our beliefs on a specific subject related to environmental health and are shared with state, local, and federal policy makers, as well as relevant environmental and public health boards. These policies remain active for 3 years from their adoption.

Introduced in 2019, the NEHA policy statement on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) model *Food Code* was updated earlier this year and was approved by the NEHA Board of Directors in July at the NEHA 2022 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition. NEHA believes that complete adoption of the current FDA model *Food Code* in retail food establishments will likely reduce the incidence of foodborne illnesses. NEHA recommends the complete adoption and implementation of the most recent version of the FDA *Food Code* by all federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial governmental agencies to promote the most current knowledge on food safety.

View this updated policy statement, as well as all other active statements, at www.neha.org/policy-statements.

Support of the Inflation Reduction Act

The Inflation Reduction Act (H.R. 5376), formerly known as the Build Back Better Act, passed the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives in August 2022. The act was signed into law on August 16, 2022, by President Joe Biden.

We are dedicated to supporting environmental health professionals who are on the front lines of helping communities mitigate and adapt to climate change and support this act. The law makes the largest investment ever made by the U.S. federal government into climate change mitigation and adaptation. It encourages a transition to clean energy, protects the public's health, and advances environmental justice by ensuring the investments deliver significant benefits to traditionally underserved communities.

Specific to environmental health, the act will provide billions of dollars in tax credits, incentives, and grants for energy and water

efficiency, clean transportation, data collection and analysis, and air quality monitoring and reporting. “This legislation acknowledges the profound impacts of climate change on human health and the importance of funding the communities and experts who are on the front lines of mitigating and adapting to these impacts,” said Dr. David Dyjack, NEHA executive director. “The environmental public health professionals who monitor our air, test our water, and stop the spread of disease in the environment are more important than ever.”

The act ultimately aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gas emissions contribute to changes in the environment such as worsening air pollution that subsequently increases respiratory and cardiovascular conditions like asthma and heart disease, or increased precipitation giving rise to ideal conditions for the development and spread of animal-borne diseases.

The act is also aligned with NEHA’s Climate Change Policy Statement (www.neha.org/sites/default/files/publications/position-papers/NEHA-Policy-Statement-Climate-Change-Oct2020.pdf) that advocates for funding for local and state public health departments and environmental and health agencies so they can support communities to:

- Conduct risk assessments and establish plans to anticipate risks for adaptation and build resilience for future generations.
- Incorporate green space and other technologies into the built environment to help reduce urban heat island effects since urban areas are usually warmer than adjacent rural areas.
- Conserve and replenish water sources. In many regions, groundwater sources have been depleted; flooding and drought can affect both the level and quality of remaining surface water sources.
- Address the need for more funding and local data.
- Take a multidisciplinary and global approach to addressing climate change to make incremental changes.
- Create a whole community approach to engage and empower the entire community.
- Strengthen community resilience to climate-related events.
- Collect baseline rates of disease and examine exposure outcome associations to quantify the impacts of climate change on health and determine direct attribution.
- Reduce barriers, share best practices, and evaluate metrics through stakeholder engagement strategies.
- Work with the Climate and Health Program within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop climate-ready states and cities.

Introduction of the Food Safety Administration Act of 2022

On July 13, 2022, House Appropriations Chair Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) joined together to introduce a bicameral (i.e., both U.S. Senate and House of Representatives) bill to establish a single food safety agency at the federal level. The Food Safety Administration Act of 2022 (www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/117/hr8358) would create the Food Safety

Administration, a single food safety agency responsible for keeping the food in our nation safe to consume.

This bill seeks to streamline the response of the federal government to food safety concerns with a single agency dedicated to safe food. The bill would establish the Food Safety Administration under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) by incorporating into this new and separate agency the existing food programs within FDA, including the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, Center for Veterinary Medicine, and the food safety responsibilities of the Office of Regulatory Affairs. The new agency would be led by a food safety expert confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

Environmental Justice Webinar

One of the foremost concerns of the Biden Administration is rectifying past environmental injustices. During a webinar on August 30, 2022, Dr. Sharunda Buchanan, interim director for the Office of Environmental Justice within HHS, spoke on efforts to integrate environmental justice into the department’s mission to improve health.

In the webinar, Dr. Buchanan discussed the efforts of her office to:

- Lead initiatives that integrate environmental justice into the HHS mission to improve health in communities across the nation.
- Advise senior leadership at the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health (OASH) and HHS on environmental justice and health issues.
- Provide leadership and subject matter expertise to develop and implement an HHS-wide strategy on environmental justice and health.
- Represent OASH and HHS at agency and interagency settings.

A recording of the webinar can be viewed at www.neha.org/government-affairs-webinars.

Successful Training With the Guam Department of Environmental Health



Staff from the Guam Department of Environmental Health discuss water safety principles at water vending and manufacturing facilities within their jurisdiction. Photo courtesy of Christopher Walker.

On July 18–20, 2022, we provided a 3-day training in Guam to the Guam Department of Environmental Health workforce on water vending and manufacturing facilities. The training included education aimed at assisting the Guam team in regu-

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lating these facilities. We were also able to take the information from the classroom and apply it during field visits of water vending facilities.

Topics presented during the training included:

- general principles of water treatment,
- water treatment components,
- taking water samples, and
- maximum contaminant levels.

Prior to the training, we directed a tabletop exercise on protecting Guam's water supply during an emergency event. The exercise focused on partnership development and highlighted the value of bringing diverse organizations to the table to protect public health during a disaster or emergency event.

Special thanks to Nikki Burns Savage of the Southern Nevada Health District who helped with the training, as well as representatives from the Guam Department of Environmental Health, Guam Environmental Protection Agency, and Guam Waterworks Authority for participating in the exercise.

NEHA Staff Profiles

As part of tradition, we feature new staff members in the *Journal* around the time of their 1-year anniversary. These profiles give you an opportunity to get to know the NEHA staff better and to learn more about the great programs and activities going on in your association. This month we are pleased to introduce you to four NEHA staff member. Contact information for all NEHA staff can be found on pages 48 and 49.



Faye Blumberg

I joined NEHA in October 2021 as an instructional designer with the Entrepreneurial Zone (EZ) department. Since starting at NEHA, I have been able to work on a variety of credentialing courses, as well as the Body Art Facility Inspector Training. One thing I love about this role is that I get to be involved in a lot of different things at once—it

is never boring! Some of the projects I get to start from scratch, where others are revamping something existing. I absolutely love the EZ team and the culture of teamwork.

I am originally from the Detroit, Michigan, area and studied biology and chemistry at Michigan State University. My master's degree from Michigan State University is in curriculum and instruction. Before working at NEHA, I was in public education for 13 years. I started as a high school science teacher and then switched to an instructional coach and curriculum writer. I also taught with the U.S. Peace Corps from 2016–2018 on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

In my spare time I can usually be found outside with my dog, Lola. I love to trail run, mountain bike, fly fish, and teach yoga.



Chana Goussetis

I came to NEHA as the communications and marketing director after 20 years of work within local public health in Boulder, Colorado, in roles as a health educator, emergency preparedness planner, and communications and marketing manager. I hold a master's degree in integrated marketing communications and apply this knowledge and experience at

NEHA daily to help the team get the word out about opportunities for education, funding, and community for the environmental health workforce, as well as help amplify the collective environmental health voice at the federal level.

I am passionate about raising the profile of NEHA nationally so that we can do even more for our members and for the profession as a whole. I am working toward this goal now by leading our rebrand and website redesign efforts, as well as developing a national campaign to bring visibility and understanding of the profession to the public and decision makers.



Nicole Kinash

Prior to my time as a NEHA employee (and as a Colorado resident), I grew up in Mahopac, New York, a small community in the Lower Hudson Valley. I attended The Ohio State University and graduated with a bachelor of science in earth sciences. During my time there, I was involved in numerous research projects as a research assistant within the School

of Earth Sciences. After graduation I accepted a role as a hydrogeologist at an environmental consulting firm based in Columbus, Ohio.

I moved to Denver in 2021 in search of new adventures and growth opportunities. I am currently a part-time graduate student at the University of Denver, pursuing a master's degree in environmental policy and management with a concentration in energy and sustainability. I aim to take on the urgent environmental challenges of our time and help develop meaningful policies and practical, sustainable solutions. In my free time I love being outdoors and exploring Colorado's endless trails and parks, whether by walking, hiking, or snowboarding. I am also passionate about playing music and following hockey and college football.

I joined NEHA in October 2021, accepting an administrative and logistical support role with the EZ department. My responsibilities mainly include being the participant manager for the FDA training courses. My goal is to help enable a good learning environment for those in the environmental health profession taking our courses. During my first year with NEHA, I have enjoyed getting to meet and work with so many amazing individuals, as well as developing a more comprehensive understanding of food safety and environmental health.



Melodie Lake

I joined NEHA in October 2021 as the editor/copywriter for the EZ department. I provide different levels of editing support to EZ depending on the project, giving me the opportunity to work on a variety of materials. I love that I never know what sorts of things I might be asked to edit on any given day, from a training course given via

PowerPoint to a textbook, or even video subtitles. The EZ team has been incredibly welcoming and supportive, and I am so glad to have joined them. It is heartening to know that my opinions and skills can help NEHA make a difference for environmental health professionals.

The road that led me here has been a winding one. I grew up in central Arizona and received my bachelor of arts degree in English from Northern Arizona University. From there, I moved to Tucson, where I spent several years working various jobs and eating excel-

lent food. I found that I have a talent for technical writing and pursued both a career and my masters of science from Northeastern University in that field. After spending 10 years working as a technical writer and manager of a content management system in the health insurance industry, I decided to broaden my horizons. I worked briefly for an engineering firm as a technical editor, then came to work at NEHA.

My partner and I moved to Denver in 2016 because we love the outdoors and Colorado's summer and fall are pretty much perfect. We have an adventure-loving dog named Mocha and we enjoy taking her hiking, snowshoeing, paddle boarding, and camping. I also enjoy reading in my spare time and I cohost a women's comic book club.

Outside of writing for my job, I also write creatively. I have finished two novels and am getting ready to pitch one to agents and editors in the fall. My short stories have appeared in several places around the web and I am always trying to find time and energy (not to mention ideas) for more. 🐾

DirectTalk

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in our nation's capital and it was virtually standing-room only. Everyone drinks and eats, and these legacy chemicals are seemingly everywhere and in everything. This issue is not red or blue—it is a universal public health issue.

So where do we go from here? I tender a few thoughts for our network of environmental health professionals.

I believe all of us should be modestly knowledgeable with the PFAS conversation. I encourage you to keep abreast of emerging health advisories and related guidance with an eye to being the voice of science in your local communities. We should be the chief science officers of our communities. As I craft this column, the World Health Organization has declared monkeypox a global health emergency. While not an environmental health issue per se, we should use opportunities like monkeypox and PFAS to share the breadth and depth of our knowledge. Let us stay on top of these issues to minimize misinformation and disinformation.

I feel PFAS is, as some have characterized, the asbestos of this generation. While there is not currently a signature disease associ-



Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on the agenda at the 76th Interstate Environmental Health Seminar held on July 20–22, 2022, in Ellicott City, Maryland. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.

ated with it, like lung cancer and emphysema (tobacco), mesothelioma (asbestos), and cognitive brain damage (lead), I bet that day is coming. Our profession should show up and speak up when the inevitable public hearings occur—it is our opportunity to lead.

Our association should consider crafting and publishing a strong policy state-

ment that is suitable for adoption by state and local jurisdictions. A formal association statement would provide a template for others to duplicate and provide a more homogenous voice in this major environmental health challenge.

Beginning in 2023, U.S. EPA will require some of the largest public drinking water systems to monitor for 29 different PFAS chemicals. Let us get prepared now to provide useful science-based recommendations to assist our communities with difficult decision making. Our offices and agencies should be prepared to help them interpret data and, in the process, raise our visibility and value to society.

The breadth and depth of environmental health issues our profession is asked to address is daunting on most days. We feel like traffic cops in a busy urban intersection after school recesses for the day. But when the giant issues of our era are upon us, such as PFAS, let us own them. We at NEHA will do our part to ensure you have access to the information you need to know when you need to know it. 🐾

DAVE

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