

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Roy Kroeger, REHS

2021 Was Not the Year We Had Hoped

It looks like we have made it to the end of another challenging year. Over the last 12 months we have learned a lot about ourselves, our profession, innovation and technology, hardships, and heartaches. With the holiday season and the new year right around the corner, I wanted to take a few minutes to reflect on this past year and look forward to a brighter future in 2022.

The beginning of 2021 brought the environmental health profession and the public in general so much hope. A COVID-19 vaccine that could help bring the world back to normal had just been released and two additional vaccines would follow soon after. With a vaccine in place, the feeling was that we would see fewer people get sick and fewer people would lose their battle to the virus. We anticipated that the economy would return to normal and people could resume their lives. With all the despair and tragedy the world encountered in 2020, we imagined that people would gain a softer heart and show more kindness and compassion to their fellow man. People could take the time to slow down and find the real meaning in their lives.

I don't want to say that everything has gone wrong because improvements have been made. As I write this column, over 400 million doses of the vaccine have been administered to 64% of the population. Most communities have lifted most, if not all, restrictions. Sporting events have nearly returned to normal and some live concerts have returned since midsummer. People are even starting to travel again and I will be attending the American Public Health Association conference in person.

I believe that 2022 will indeed be a year of opportunities.

With all the good that has happened, some dark clouds have remained throughout the year. Far too many people have chosen to not receive the vaccine for their own reasons. A new variant of the virus has slowed the progress in the battle. And the Delta variant has found a way to break through the vaccine protection in some people. Cases early in the year, and with the variant, have surpassed all of last year's numbers for illness and death, and they continue to climb.

The hope that people would contribute to a more compassionate society has also not come to fruition. The year has witnessed several violent protests and riots, some of which are still occurring. The very public health professionals that have endured so much to help people in their communities have become targets of hate and violence across the country. Many of them have decided to retire, while others were asked to resign. How can it be that part of our society has turned on the very profession that gave up so much to make everyone safer.

The virus is not the only thing that has prevented a return to routine. A large percentage of the world's population has decided not to reenter the workforce, at least not yet. The shortage of employees has in itself wreaked

havoc on the global economy. Many consumer goods (not just sanitizer and toilet paper) are becoming scarce. Medicines, electronics, auto parts, clothes, and lumber are but a few. You may have even seen food shortages as you prepared for your holiday feasts this year.

I believe that 2022 will indeed be a year of opportunities. The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) will undoubtedly be busy with the NEHA-FDA Retail Flex Funding Model Grant Program (I hope everyone got their applications in), student internships, and many other opportunities for our members. We are all looking forward to making the new year prosperous for many of our members. NEHA plans to hold its 2022 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition as an in-person event in Spokane, Washington—the first since 2019. There will also be a virtual component of the 2022 AEC for those who are unable to attend the in-person event. I am also hopeful for a better year because I have had concert tickets since the end of 2019 that I would like to use.

I would be amiss if I didn't recognize a few stalwarts of environmental health that we lost this past year. While this list is not inclusive and there may be some that I've overlooked, these individuals went above and beyond for the profession and the association.

- **Dennis Catanyag** (January 2021): Dennis Catanyag was fatally wounded while performing duties protecting and serving his community as a registered environmental health specialist for Sacramento County in California. He worked for Sacramento County for 15 years in the Environmental

Health Division conducting food protection, recreational health, and lead poisoning prevention inspections.

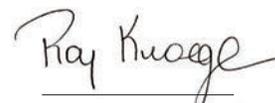
- **Brian Hess** (March 2021): Brian Hess was the program and operations manager within the Program and Partnership Development department at NEHA in the Denver office. He started in the position in May 2019 and worked to manage and improve internal processes including budgets and grant reporting, as well as served as a liaison for his department with other departments across the association.
- **Scott Meador** (May 2021) Scott Meador worked for the Tulsa Health Department for 15 years and coordinated its vector control program. He was dedicated to improving the quality of life for the resident of Tulsa County and the improvements he made in the mosquito control program benefited all. Meador was also an active member

of the NEHA Vector Program Committee, contributing his time and expertise to develop a policy statement for NEHA on comprehensive mosquito control and to develop timely webinars on integrated mosquito and tick management.

- **Boyd T. Marsh** (September 2021): Boyd Marsh served as president of NEHA from 1981–1982 and was the recipient of the Walter F. Snyder Award in 1989. He was active in environmental health and worked for the city of Cleveland and retired as the health commissioner of Summit County, Ohio, in 2000. Marsh also taught environmental health as an adjunct professor at Cleveland State University, Bowling Green University, and the University of Akron.
- **George Nakamura** (September 2021): George Nakamura started his career with the California Department of Public Health in the Food and Drug Branch.

He also worked in San Mateo County and finished his public service at Contra Costa County. He was a strong supporter of environmental health and an active NEHA member serving as a technical advisor and subject matter expert in food safety. He was a contractor for NEHA at the time of his passing.

I want to ask each and every one of you who reads this column to please consider making the world a better place over the next year. Please spend some time with your loved ones this holiday season; none of us know what tomorrow will bring. Have a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Joyous Kwanzaa, Yuletide Greetings, Happy Holidays, Joyeux Noël, and Feliz Navidad! 🐻



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