

## NEHA NEWS

## NEHA Government Affairs: 2021 Accomplishments and 2022 Goals

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I've completed my first full year as director of Government Affairs for the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and, as such, would like to list the accomplishments of the program in 2021. This work is not only of the program but

also of the NEHA Board of Directors, NEHA Policies and Bylaws Committee, the many public health associations NEHA works with, our federal environmental health partners, and the NEHA staff who provided much needed support to make government affairs happen. All of us working together made government affairs work at NEHA.

On behalf of the members of NEHA and the environmental health workforce, NEHA Government Affairs would like to share the following highlights:

- NEHA adopted 12 new policy statements for a total of 18 current policy statements available on the NEHA website at the end of 2021.
- NEHA issued eight new position statements.
- The policy statements gave direction for NEHA to sign-on to 20 letters to Congress and the Biden Administration in 2021.
- The policy statements led to NEHA supporting five congressional bills and one congressional resolution in 2021.
- NEHA got Congress to thank the environmental health workforce via the Congressional Public Health Thank You Resolution (H.R. 62).
- NEHA sent a letter to the White House and Congress regarding the inclusion of the environmental health workforce in the \$7.4 billion effort to rebuild the public health workforce.
- NEHA sent 33 testimonials to state legislatures regarding state bills on cottage foods, food freedom, natural disasters, and the importance of credentialing the environmental health workforce.
- Through the fourth annual Hill Day held on April 22, 2021, the NEHA Board of Directors visited 44 congressional offices virtually, meeting with 102 congressional staff and 1 congressperson to support funding for the environmental health workforce and federal environmental health agencies.
- NEHA Government Affairs posted 12 blogs and hosted 3 webinars in 2021 that kept environmental health professionals apprised of public affairs.

The NEHA Government Affairs program had a successful 2021 and we're planning for even more success in 2022, which will provide new challenges in government affairs. Being the foremost association advocating for environmental health, NEHA is in a unique role. Many associations advocate for public health, and several for the environment, but only NEHA advocates for environmental health. NEHA is one of the few associations that

advocates at both federal and state levels, especially since almost 95% of funding for environmental health comes from state and local sources.

In 2022, NEHA will remain an active voice before Congress and the White House. Some of the activities the NEHA Government Affairs program plans for in 2022 includes:

- Working with the Congressional Public Health Caucus and NSF International to organize a congressional briefing on food safety for congressional staff.
- Hosting a congressional site visit on food safety through a tour of a Publix Market in Northern Virginia with the office of Representative Rob Wittman (VI-R).
- Holding a Hill Day for the NEHA board in March to promote environmental health and the Food and Drug Administration budget before members of the Congressional Appropriations Committee, as well as highlighting NEHA before congressional appropriators.
- Promoting the Environmental Health Workforce Act (H.R. 2661), Public Health Workforce Loan Forgiveness Program (H.B. 3297), Public Health Infrastructure Save Lives Act (S. 674), and Test Your Well Water Act.
- Tracking and responding to state legislation on the foremost environmental health concerns, including food freedom, environmental health credentialing and licensing, body art, food safety, private wells, septic systems, and threats to environmental health programs.
- Providing states with the Food Code Adoption Toolkit created by the Retail Food Safety Regulatory Association Collaborative to assist in efforts to update state food codes.

These efforts align with the NEHA Strategic Plan to promote environmental health and highlight the profession before policy makers at federal, state, and local levels. Each of these planned events is designed to advance the profession, one that is unknown to many elected officials. The basic elements of the profession—that it protects the public from environmental threats; saves both the public and private sectors from millions of dollars in lost workdays and excess illness; and is a professional, credentialed profession that requires a trained and educated workforce—are unknown to most policy makers. NEHA intends to bring environmental health out of the shadows and the goal of the Government Affairs program in 2022 is to make environmental health important to federal, state, and local officials.

To learn more about the 2021 achievements and 2022 goals, please visit [www.neha.org/GA-blog](http://www.neha.org/GA-blog).

### NEHA Releases Food Freedom Operations Policy Statement

The NEHA Board of Directors adopted a policy statement related to food freedom operations in January 2022. This action is a first step in raising awareness about the risk of allowing some foods to

be sold without food safety oversight or training, an effort many states and local jurisdictions have been putting in place.

Laws permitting some form of food freedom operations, home-based restaurants, or cottage food operations have been passed in every state. Laws exempting almost every form of regulatory food safety oversight have been enacted in Maine, New Mexico, North Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. Home-based restaurants, in which an individual prepares and serves a restaurant-style meal in their home to paying customers, are permitted in California.

Unfortunately, with increased popularity of alternative food production and sales operations comes the increased potential for negative health consequences. Data from the National Outbreak Reporting System show that in the decade from 2008–2018, there were 1,225 reported foodborne illness outbreaks, 22,893 illnesses, 2,737 hospitalizations, and 89 deaths attributed to food prepared in private homes and residences. A 2017 study collected swab samples from 100 homes in Pennsylvania and found that 45% of home kitchens tested positive for a foodborne pathogen and 12% had more than one pathogen present, including fecal coliforms and *Staphylococcus aureus*.

“We recognize the value of these operations, particularly as economic opportunities,” said NEHA Executive Director David Dyjack, DrPH, CIH. “We’re also concerned about the inherent food safety hazards that could arise from these practices and subsequent foodborne illnesses it could cause. That’s why it’s so important that some food safety standards are incorporated for these alternative operations.”

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) model *Food Code* is a model for ensuring food is unadulterated and honestly presented when offered to the consumer. It represents the best advice for a uniform system that addresses the safety and protection of food offered at retail and in food service. The FDA *Food Code* explicitly states that “food prepared in a private home may not be used or offered for human consumption in a food establishment.”

To best protect the public from illness, hospitalization, and even death caused by foodborne illness, the NEHA policy statement on food freedom operations recommends a series of protections that should be in place if the FDA model *Food Code* is not required to be followed. These protections include requiring organizations operating according to food freedom laws, home-based restaurant guidance, and/or cottage food laws to provide prominent labeling of any food prepared and sold, acquire food only from inspected facilities, ensure the water supply used to prepare the food is

potable, ensure the operator has liability insurance, provide training for food workers, and practice time/temperature controls and proper handwashing.

Individuals and organizations are encouraged to use the NEHA Policy Statement on Food Freedom Operations to help describe food safety concerns and solutions with local and state decision makers who influence food policy. View the policy at [www.neha.org/policy-statements](http://www.neha.org/policy-statements).

## NEHA Selects National Registry as Exam Provider for Professional Food Manager Certificate

NEHA announced in March that it is now partnering with the National Registry of Food Safety Professionals (NRFSP) to be the exam provider for the NEHA Professional Food Manager Certificate exam. Certified food managers are an essential part of a food safety culture that keeps customers safe from foodborne illnesses and the Professional Food Manager Certificate assures the knowledge and skills of entry-level food managers. “Our decision to partner with NRFSP was focused on making it as seamless as possible for trainers and proctors,” said Rance Baker, NEHA Entrepreneurial Zone director. “We’ll be able to offer a one-stop shop for food safety trainers and proctors.”

Trainers will be able to order the Professional Food Manager Certificate exams in English, Spanish, Modern and Traditional Chinese, and Korean, as well as the *Professional Food Manager (6th Edition)*, and other training materials from NEHA. To become a proctor with NRFSP, individuals need to complete the NRFSP online Test Administrator/Proctor Training Course and then the proctor application at <https://www.nrfsp.com/exam-center/become-a-test-administrator-proctor/administrator-proctor-application>. After the NRFSP proctor process is complete, applicants will receive a proctor number and then will be ready to start proctoring the Professional Food Manager Certificate exam.

To receive NEHA Trainer benefits, individuals should include “NEHA” along with their company name in the “Company Name” field of the application. For customer service support with the NRFSP proctor application, individuals should email NRFSP at [customerservice@nrfsp.com](mailto:customerservice@nrfsp.com) or call (800) 446-0257.

Professional Food Manager Certification exams, the *Professional Food Manager (6th Edition)*, and other training materials are available in the NEHA Bookstore ([www.neha.org/store](http://www.neha.org/store)) or by contacting Trisha Bramwell at [tbramwell@neha.org](mailto:tbramwell@neha.org). 🐾

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