



National Environmental Health Association

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Dear NEHA Members and Friends,

I am a sister, daughter, former wife, niece, aunt, granddaughter to black males. I have been a student, scientist, and field inspector, and am a current professor of environmental health and director of a premedical and predoctoral program. It is a sad day for me to know that a black male was knocked down in daylight in an American street to be killed by a policeman with a knee on his neck as he shouted out, "I can't breathe." I would not want that to happen to you, me, or anyone. It is sad for me to witness the crowds of people in unrest in our cities during the COVID-19 pandemic. What is the thinking of people in all of this? Americans are sick and tired of the death and indifference. I am from Alabama and live in Georgia, the cradle of the civil rights movement. I participated in sit-ins and walked in peaceful protests. Thankfully, I did this under good leadership and guidance. Yes, I was on the frontline of the march in Forsyth County, Georgia, as the late and great Dick Gregory asked me to join him. I saw hooded clansmen in the town square whirling their whips. Today, I feel all of the pain of America and I write with tears in my eyes. As a leader, I must respond by denouncing all the wrongs, past and present.

The concern that I have is for others that are in harm's way. Protect human life. It is precious. As environmental health professionals, we work for the protection of people and the environment every day. Black lives matter! Human lives matter! Environmental health matters! Destroying life and property and ignoring medical, scientific, and public health advice and protocols are not the way to go for survival. We are in a global pandemic and we must take care of ourselves and others. We must respect the life and property of others. Each day as you awaken, ask what you will do for yourself and next, what will you do for others. If we do not take care of ourselves and others we are in violation. There is one world with billions of people and abundant living things around us to be enjoyed. We want health and safety throughout our world.

The NEHA mission to "advance the environmental health and protection professional for the purpose of providing a healthful environment for all" is highlighted. Let us adhere to caring about ourselves and others and providing a healthful environment globally. We need to work together to end racism and stop the loss of life and the destruction of property for little or no reason. We also need to stop the infectious spread of both COVID-19 and racism. The destruction of property puts us further in harm's way because of the exposures and cleanup that follow. Nontrained volunteers with little or no personal protective equipment (PPE) have participated in cleanups and that too is a problem. As stated by Dr. Herman Koren, "Environmental health is the right arm of public health." As such, we must join the movement against violence and the destruction and contamination of property. Help the environmental health professional by ending racism and the COVID-19 pandemic.

I cry out for "One World, One NEHA." We must communicate to resolve our differences. Law enforcement officials, experts, and community, political, and religious leaders need to come to the table, talk out the problems, find cures, and start implementing solutions now. We need knowledge, education, hearts filled with love, and willing hands to work to preserve ourselves, others, and property. I call for NEHA to create the Dr. Bailus Walker, Jr., Diversity Award to recognize people in the environmental health profession who have shown excellence in promoting diversity in their communities and workplaces. The late Dr. Walker was a distinguished researcher, professor, and environmental and public health professional. He is an excellent role model for all of us to follow. The award would be open to all of our employees and members.

We must fight racism and promote a culture of respect for each other and for the environmental health profession. We are here to prevent, promote, and protect all through safe and healthy environments. We are "One NEHA."

Sincerely yours,

Priscilla Oliver

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