

## NEHA NEWS

**NEHA Advocates for Environmental Health in Washington, DC**

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) President Dr. D. Gary Brown, Region 7 Vice-President Tim Hatch, and Director of Government Affairs Doug Farquhar visited the U.S. Senate during the NEHA Board of Directors meeting in Washington, DC, on October 13, 2022, to advocate for the environmental health workforce.

Our representatives first met with the office of Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Senate minority leader, to discuss environmental health and the importance of federal support of state and local food safety, vector control, and epidemiology programs, among other environmental health needs. Dr. Brown emphasized that the environmental health workforce relies on federal support from the Food and Drug Administration and the National Center for Environmental Health within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



Photo 1. National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) representatives Doug Farquhar (left) and Dr. D. Gary Brown (right) visit the office of Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL). Photo courtesy of NEHA.

We next met with staff from the office of Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL), vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee (Photo 1). Hatch spoke about Alabama's environmental health activities and the value of federal funds to support environmental health. The staff from Shelby's office knew of environmental health, referencing the \$5 million in federal support being provided for septic systems in Lowndes County. Hatch also spoke on emergency management and other concerns facing the state. He noted the value of the training provided through the Public Health Infrastructure Act, but added that environmental health is often overlooked. Our representatives also met with office staff of Senator Tommy Tuberville (R-AL; Photo 2).



Photo 2. National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) Board of Directors representatives Dr. D. Gary Brown (left) and Tim Hatch (right) visit the office of Senator Tommy Tuberville (R-AL). Photo courtesy of NEHA.

Finally, we were fortunate to hold a meeting in the Senate hallways with Dr. Pat Breyse, director, and Pam Berman, associate director of policy, from the National Center for Environmental Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry within CDC. They were in Washington, DC, to testify before the Senate on climate change.

If you have questions about this visit or would like to support future government affairs activities, please email [communications@neha.org](mailto:communications@neha.org).

**NEHA Recommends Improvements to Food and Drug Administration Human Foods Program**

In October, NEHA provided comment on the operations of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Human Foods Program to the Reagan-Udall Foundation as part of their FDA Operational Evaluation. Their evaluation will focus on structure, leadership, authority, resources, and the culture of the human foods program.

NEHA represents more than 6,700 individuals who are responsible for keeping food safe and communities free from foodborne illness daily and for implementing federal food safety regulations and programs. "Environmental health and foodborne illness risk factors are profoundly local. Individual restaurants are the most reported locations of food preparation associated with foodborne illness outbreaks, many in sit-down establishments," said Doug Farquhar, NEHA Government Affairs director. "History has shown that the single most important investment FDA can make is to build the capacity of local environmental health inspectors by supporting systems that provide training, skills, tools, and resources."

Our recommendations included engaging food safety programs at state, tribal, local, and territorial governments; increasing and appropriately funding food safety agencies; educating, credentialing, and training food safety regulators and industry workers; and adoption of the most recent FDA *Food Code*, among other recommendations.

We also commented on the challenges facing food safety programs. This feedback included difficulties created by the legal patchwork of federal, state, tribal, local, and territorial rules and regulations; limited capacity within organizations to track and surveil foodborne illness outbreaks across organizations; limited funding allocated to the Human Foods Program within the FDA budget; and current program oversight within the FDA structure. We expressed support for the Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards to encourage the use of a standardized set of guidelines for food safety, as well as delegation of FDA authority and funding to state, tribal, local, and territorial food safety programs.

You can learn more about the FDA Operational Evaluation being conducted by the Reagan-Udall Foundation at <https://reaganudall.org/programs/operational-evaluation-fdas-human-foods-tobacco-programs>.

## 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 our 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 two NEHA staff members. Contact information for all NEHA staff can be found on pages 54 and 55.



### Heather Folker

I am the director of membership services and credentialing at NEHA. My team consists of Eileen Neison, credentialing manager; Bobby Medina, credentialing specialist; and Alfonso Valadez, membership services representative. Outside of membership and credentialing, I also manage our various awards and scholarships, as well as fundraising and affiliate

relationship building along with Michèle Samarya-Timm.

I came to NEHA in December 2021 from the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations. At these associations I held the position of communications and membership director. My expertise in the area of membership comes from over 20 years of working in association membership positions. I have also held national officer positions for bar association membership and communications professionals.

After 20 years working with the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations, I am excited about my new career with environmental health. I love meeting new people and understanding their challenges. My hope is to provide NEHA members with the support and resources

they need to help them do their jobs successfully. In the next year my goal is the increase membership numbers by 5% and credential holders by 5%. The project I am most excited about right now is the launch of our online community. The platform will provide NEHA members with an inclusive online environment where they can seek advice, exchange information, develop relationships, collaborate, and enjoy camaraderie through an open exchange.

I grew up on a farm in southeast Iowa and moved to Colorado after graduating from the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. Since moving to Colorado, I have worked as a wrangler, a sales representative, a marketing professional, and my 20-year career at the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations. During my free time I enjoy yoga, hiking, horseback riding, and hanging out with my cool 15-year-old son. Many years ago, I received the title of Miss Buckskin World and Miss Congeniality. I also volunteer as a kitten foster for the Maxfund Animal Adoption Center on a regular basis.



### Katherine Sheppard

I joined NEHA in November 2021 and am excited to celebrate my 1-year anniversary as executive assistant to Dr. David Dyjack, NEHA executive director, and Gail Vail, associate executive director. I perform, coordinate, and oversee general administrative duties while providing an extensive level of support. I aid them in making the best use of their

time and ensure work is handled efficiently and effectively. I provide the invisible support and anticipate needs while managing the day-to-day workflow and assisting in prioritizing various projects.

I most recently also took on the role as liaison for the NEHA Board of Directors that consists of five national officers and nine regional vice-presidents. I work closely with board members to coordinate activities related to board correspondence, scheduling, expense reports, and meetings throughout the year. I am also responsible for maintaining the board handbook and the NEHA Policy and Procedure Manual and Articles of Incorporation.

Working so closely alongside Dr. Dyjack has been an amazing education into the world of environmental health. Aside from that experience, my position allows me to work with literally everyone within the NEHA organization, as well as so many influential figures throughout the environmental health and public health sectors. I am truly honored to serve in this capacity and look forward to continuing my learning process.

I am proud to have served as a 37F soldier—a psychological operations specialist in the U.S. Army. This training and education taught me how to be strong in the face of uncertainty and the importance of teamwork. I see this teamwork modeled within our organization. I received my bachelor's degree in natural science and mathematics. My coursework included two senior-level environmental science studies that opened my eyes into developing a

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clear understanding of the fundamentals of global environmental science and the factors required to maintain ecological stability, sustainability, and the preservation of worldwide resources. I have 16 years of assistant experience having supported executives and physicians in corporate, private, and healthcare sectors.

I was born and raised in Michigan, spent many years in California, had a brief stay in Texas, and finally moved to Colorado

where I will most likely remain. In my free time I enjoy a variety of physical pursuits to include beach volleyball, mountain biking, road cycling, and rollerblading. My current passions are my BMW Adventure Motorcycle and my Harley Davidson Dyna/Super Glide Motorcycle. I thoroughly enjoy riding them all over the dirt trails and beautiful canyon roads in this beautiful state! ✨

## SUPPORT THE NEHA ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION



Our Endowment Foundation was created to allow us to do more for the environmental health profession than our annual budget might allow. Donations are used for the sole purpose of advancing the profession and its practitioners.

Thank you to our donors!

This list represents all donations made to the Endowment Foundation in the last 12 months as of press time. It does not include amounts pledged.

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