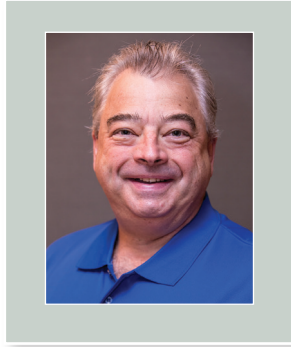


▶ PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



D. Gary Brown,
DrPH, CIH, RS, DAAS

We Are Your Strongest Advocate

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Courage is an inner resolution to go forward despite obstacles.” My fellow environmental health professionals, every day you show tremendous courage, fortitude, and empathy toward protecting the public. You constantly amaze me by coming up with novel solutions to problems people never realized they had. In our profession, people never speak about being bored. Speaking with environmental health professionals throughout the land, everyone loves our field. Please share your passion for environmental health with everyone you meet just like the individuals on Sesame Street.

As Dr. David Dyjack, executive director of the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), states, “Environmental health is a contact sport.” As such, contact is necessary to get our message out. We share the message of environmental health with our elected officials and policy makers to improve the profession and provide our members with the tools they need. The NEHA Board of Directors, along with several of our members, spoke with elected officials and policy makers during our sixth annual Hill Day on February 23, 2023, to educate, enlighten, and hopefully, even entertain.

Darwin D. Martin stated, “A teacher’s job is to take a bunch of live wires and see that they are well-grounded.” Doug Farquhar, our director of Government Affairs, does an unbelievable job in preparing us for Hill Day and ensuring we are well-grounded.

Our message is to speak about the importance of a robust and well-resourced environmental health workforce.

He even provides a Hawaiian shirt and sneaker wearing fashionista such as myself with professional dress tips such as wearing socks and a tie.

We are the profession’s strongest advocate for excellence in the practice of environmental health as we deliver on our mission to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce. Our message is to speak about the importance of a robust and well-resourced environmental health workforce. Many people might not know that we represent almost 7,000 government and private sector environmental health professionals in the U.S.

The messages we shared during Hill Day included:

- Environmental health professionals assure healthy, safe, and prosperous communities.
- Environmental health professionals often work outside traditional health depart-

ments and might be omitted from the benefits of legislation if not specifically called out.

- Environmental health professionals are allies in environmental justice efforts.
- Environmental health professionals are on the front lines in climate and health issues.

Environmental health services are not a luxury. They are essential to providing the public basic needs, such as safe drinking water, clean air, safe food, healthy housing, climate change adaptation, emergency preparedness, and more. Environmental health has long been recognized as being a crucial service of government at state, local, tribal, territorial, and federal levels.

Environmental health professionals are scientifically trained and certified to identify and mitigate environmental dangers as well as promote alternatives. We are handling threats on the front lines of public health. Environmental health professionals form a critical component of the public health delivery system, providing services to curb environmental health threats and prevent adverse health outcomes. We assist communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disease outbreaks and natural and anthropogenic disasters. We are on the front lines of public health handling threats such as environmental inequities (e.g., lead exposure), climate change (e.g., drought), food safety (e.g., baby food), safe drinking water (e.g., perfluorooctanesulfonic acid [PFOS]), and clean air (e.g., ozone).

Environmental health professionals are strategically positioned to identify and intervene to prevent public health and environmental health threats from affecting local populations.

As a nation, the U.S. spends over \$3 trillion annually on healthcare but lags behind other developed countries in practically every health metric. The lack of investment into the environmental health system is costly for this nation.

The top four messages we wanted the congressional staff we met with during Hill Day to remember were to:

1. Fund the National Center for Environmental Health within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at \$300 million and to fund the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry at \$95 million.
2. Fund the Federal and State Initiative of the Food and Drug Administration—which supports food safety inspections—at \$140 million and provide \$35 million

for states to purchase equipment to serve healthier meals and improve food safety.

3. Encourage the Health Resources and Services Administration to include environmental health within the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program.
4. Share with the congressional offices the importance of environmental health to state and local public health agencies.

The author J.K. Rowling said, “No story lives unless someone wants to listen. The stories we love best do live in us forever.” Please share your environmental health stories with your elected officials and policy makers to improve the profession. Even if you are not comfortable speaking with these individuals, remember what Elmo said, “If you keep practicing, you can do anything.” The more we share our stories with elected officials, policy makers, fellow scientists, and the public, the greater the impact.

When people think of how public health improves their lives, what comes to mind

is what environmental health ensures—clean air, food, and water along with a safe and healthy place to live, work, and play. Environmental health provides the biggest bang for the buck of all of the health fields. As Warren Buffett stated, “Someone’s sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.” Environmental health professionals have planted forests to protect the public.

I look forward to seeing you at our 2023 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition in New Orleans, Louisiana, on July 31–August 3. Thank you for all of your hard work to protect the public every day. Please continue helping me spread the word that environmental health is public health. As Yoda sagely stated, “Try not. Do or do not. There is no try.” ❀



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