



ROB BLAKE, R.E.H.S, M.P.H. 2004 SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

I am seeking your support for the office of Second Vice President of National Environmental Health Association. Currently, I serve as the Environmental Health Director for the DeKalb County Board of Health in metropolitan Atlanta. My employer has approved and supports my running for this national office. I have been a NEHA member for over 15 years and have been a board member of the Michigan and Georgia affiliates.



I have presented at numerous NEHA workshops and annual conferences on diverse topics including bio-terrorism readiness, metro Atlanta's West Nile virus program, radon and other indoor air contaminants, fees for cost recovery, geographic information systems, presentation and media skills, and community right-to-know. During my career, I have been an active member of several NEHA committees and initiatives and am currently serving on the Epidemiology Training Development and Chemical Terrorism Readiness committees.

There are a number of issues facing the Environmental Health profession that I believe NEHA should address:

- Improving the image of the "*Invisible Profession*"
- Future leadership
- Workforce development including recruitment and retention
- Emergency response readiness
- Enhancing educational outreach of NEHA.

Improving the image of the "*Invisible Profession*"

Environmental Health work is often invisible to the general public because a job well done does not make news. As a member of the Georgia Environmental Health Association Board, I was recently filmed as part of an outreach effort in a tape called "*Environmental Health, The Invisible Profession*".

I originally studied and worked in London, UK, and was an active member in our sister organization in that country. Although based in a much smaller country, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health has significant political influence and is often quoted in the national media. There is even a TV series portraying the work of the Environmental Health Officer. Although NEHA is based in Denver, I firmly believe we should maintain a higher profile in Washington, D.C. I believe this could be initiated through partnerships with sister associations already located there and accustomed to dealing with the political processes.

Rob Blake, Director
Environmental Health
DeKalb County Board of Health
445 Winn Way, Suite 320
Decatur, GA 30030

Phone: (404) 508-7900
Fax: (404) 508-7979
E.mail: rgblake@gdph.state.ga.us

More Information @

www.blake4neha.org
rob@blake4neha.org

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after Feb. 13, 2004

Future leadership issues

The National Conference of Local Environmental Health Administrators, of which I am chair, has recognized the depletion of leadership ranks due to baby boomer retirements, early retirement packages, and flattened hierarchies increasing stress of those in leadership positions. The loss of 20 to 30 years of experience in personnel issues, budget management, and program leadership cannot be replaced overnight.

For those leadership positions that are available, advancement to those positions by Environmental Health professionals is rarely encouraged. This contributes to low morale in the profession. NEHA should partner with national agencies and educational institutions to develop and implement a plan to address this issue.

Workforce development issues including recruitment and retention

Recent world events have created increased funding streams which, unfortunately, tend to bypass the EH arena. NEHA must be involved in the funding decisions as these funding streams are created. These opportunities could fund new and innovative positions and programs.

Many of our agencies suffer from high turn over rates and subsequent poor morale. At the local level, I have been actively engaged in career ladder construction for our staff. The current economic climate in the private sector and these new career ladders has slowed the rotating doors in employee turnover. Also in DeKalb County, we have an aggressive student internship program to aid with summer workloads, to give needed experience to the students, and to look at prospective employees.

Emergency response readiness

In the past, a job in EH was often viewed as an 8 - 5 responsibility. Today's world of complex new threats requires us to develop a 24/7 mentality. We must develop strong relationships with other emergency responders, since Public Health may well be the lead agency in the event of a public health emergency. Our educational outreach in this area must take advantage of available distance learning technologies to reduce the financial burden of travel expenses on local public health agencies. NEHA should also strengthen partnerships with national emergency preparedness agencies to provide tools for use by responders at the local level.

Enhancing the educational outreach of NEHA

One of the primary purposes of this organization is to provide timely and accurate presentations of EH practice. This is done very well in the Annual Education Conferences and in the funded workshops. Since the events of 9/11, fewer people want to travel by plane, and the financial squeeze has placed even more pressure on the travel and training budgets of many employers. NEHA should continue to develop other methods of providing training that use cutting edge technology, and yet preserve the revenue streams that the organization needs to thrive.

I am committed to the advancement of environmental health practice and to the growth of our professional organization. With your support, I will endeavor to keep these issues in the forefront of NEHA activities.