



WSEHA NEWSLETTER

WASHINGTON STATE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: Nancy Bernard

Dear Colleagues,

I'm sitting here on a dark, rainy, blustery day and thinking how fast we went from summer to fall this year. I'm glad (extremely glad) to be done with wildfire smoke, but I do wish we could have enjoyed our late summer sunshine without it. I kept trying to get to some corner of the state without smoke on the weekends. Another year with all our state affected by WFS again showed the importance of our work in Environmental Public Health! In our home we were able to keep the smoke out and bring in outside air through a combination of MERV 13 and charcoal filters – which had to be changed out midway through the weeks of smoke, supplemented with portable HEPA/charcoal filters. We set this system up a few years ago as outside air became increasingly bad at times, based on the guidance EPH has developed.

The work that you and all your agencies do to support and educate people in prevention and control of environmental health problems is so important. As climate change progresses, with hotter temperatures, more draught, floods, and fires, every area we work in will become more critical. The risk to human health is growing and increasing environmental public health challenges. Food safety, water recreation, water supplies, air quality, zoonotic and communicable diseases, housing, etc. are all being impacted by climate change. Environmental public health rose to the challenge of the worst pandemic in a hundred years. And now we're rising to the challenge of climate change. I am very proud of being an environmental health specialist.

The Washington State Environmental Health Association wants to help each of you by providing networking, support, and education. The board is open to ideas from you. Planning is underway for the Annual Educational Conference May 8-10, 2023, at the Hotel Murano in Tacoma. Our first fully in person conference since Yakima in 2019. It's a great location with lots of possibilities for activities. We are also interested in knowing if there is interest in other learning/networking opportunities during the year. Please let us know and volunteer your ideas and time.

Sincerely,

Nancy Bernard, MPH, REHS, CPSI

2023 AEC
Call for Proposals
Deadline: Nov. 30th

Proposal Form
2023 AEC Webpage



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Like [WSEHA’s Facebook page](#) ! Stay up-to-date with the goings-on in the field of Environmental Public Health.

Another way to keep up with what we’re doing is to join our mailing list. Go to wseha.org to join the mailing list or email Megan McNelly at megan@wseha.org.

Next Newsletter Deadline:

January 30, 2022

The Washington State Environmental Health Association Newsletter is the official publication of WSEHA. Membership in WSEHA includes a subscription to the newsletter. Membership in WSEHA is not required for acceptance of articles in the newsletter.

Opinions expressed in articles published in the WSEHA newsletter should not be accepted necessarily as statements of policy or opinions of WSEHA.

Give me 5! We ask five quick questions of local EH staff to show the diverse and dynamic Environmental Health profession in our state. We are eager to present two new showcases from eastern Washington in this edition.



Northeast Tri County Health District

Thank you to Jon Ness, Environmental Health Director, for highlighting activities in the northeast corner of our state and our only local health jurisdiction overseeing three counties.

Grant County Health District

Thank you Stephanie Shopbell, Environmental Health Manager, for helping us navigate environmental health in the #1 crop-producing county in the state

NORTHEAST TRI COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT WITH JON NESS

EH program summary

Northeast Tri County Health District was created in 1977 when Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties agreed to form a single health district to serve all three counties. In our Environmental Health Division, we have five Environmental Health Specialists, a Director, and great support staff, that also help out in other programs. While our Environmental Health Specialists have certain programs that they dedicate most of their time to, all work in more than one program. Rebecka Hullinger works in the food and school health and safety programs. Bryan Hunt works in the on-site septic and solid waste programs. Alice Campbell works in the on-site septic, water recreation, and drinking water programs. Selena Olson just started with us, and will be working in the food, school health and safety, summer camps, harmful algae blooms, and outdoor air quality programs. We have a new EHS starting soon in Pend Oreille county and they will be a generalist in most programs.

Our part of the state is unique in that we have some amazing outdoor recreation, but it is not nearly as crowded as the central cascades. This area is often called the forgotten corner of Washington State. Mary Selecky, Washington State's longest serving Secretary of Health, from 1999-2013, began her career in Washington State at Northeast Tri County Health District. In the past, mining was a thriving industry in the area, but now it is primarily logging, recreation, and a few industries. Hewescraft and Raider boats are built in Colville. Metaline Falls, in the far northeast corner of the state, is where the historical Cutter Theatre is located.

What is unique about your area/county/part of the state?

What are 1-3 current EH projects or goals for your jurisdiction?

We are currently working on updating our Environmental Health database system, which we believe will help us better serve the community in the future. Like many local health jurisdictions, we had to prioritize our limited resources to best serve our communities. With the new Foundational Public Health Services funding, we have been able to add an additional staff person which will allow us to inspect schools on an annual basis, enhance our food program, implement a summer camp program, and be able to

EH SPOTLIGHT continued

respond to harmful algae bloom complaints.

We have a very dedicated team that is passionate about building relationships with the people they serve. As an example, in 2021, Alice Campbell was awarded the “Grace Under Pressure” drinking water award for all her hard work assisting water systems as she was also helping out with the COVID pandemic response. The team is very committed to help people comply with applicable regulations, as well as help them understand the reasoning behind the rules.

What would you like others to know more about your EH program?

Why do you work in Environmental Health?

My parents were the type of people that would always help out. They passed that mindset of caring about the people in your community onto me. When I started in public health, I immediately saw the commitment other staff had in helping their communities, and always trying to make the world we live in a healthier place. Whether it was advocating for higher vaccination rates, working to reduce the frequency of sexually transmitted infections, or helping a food-worker know how to safely cool cooked food, the compassion my co-workers showed to their community members resonated with me. While there are certainly challenges working in a regulatory environment, there is also great satisfaction in working with the people to protect and enhance the health of our communities.

GRANT COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT WITH STEPHANIE SHOPBELL



EH program summary

Grant County Health District (GCHD) was formed on December 4, 1967. Our EH Division consists of the EH Manager, 6 Environmental Health Specialists, and 1 Environmental Health Technician. In the past, we’ve also hired a temporary EHT in the summer to help out with temporary foods. That was put on hold in 2020, but we plan to bring it back in 2023. The GCHD Admin Division has 2 Program Specialists, one each for OSS and the food programs, that process applications and manage our databases. Though not part of the EH Division, they are definitely part of our EH team and we couldn’t do what we do without them.

EH staff are “specialized generalists”. No one works in every program, but everyone has multiple programs they work in. Our EH team covers drinking water, including a Group B program and well delegations, food

EH SPOTLIGHT continued

safety, onsite septic, solid waste complaints and permitted facilities, zoonotic and EH epidemiology, and water recreation. And of course, there's always "other duties as assigned".

Our Administrator likes to say Grant County likes our fairs and festivals and there is no bigger "festival" than concerts at the Gorge Amphitheatre. Consistently ranked as one of the top outdoor concert venues in the world, The Gorge becomes our largest city overnight, with a capacity of nearly 30,000 people. As an outdoor, rural venue, with both temporary and permanent infrastructure there have been public health challenges and successes over the years working with the various stakeholders involved to keep the Gorge operating.

What is unique about your area/county/part of the state?

Our food program staff work most closely with the venue on an ongoing basis. We have pre-season meetings every year and have worked with the hospitality company in charge of food service to create a food safety liaison position on their staff and develop food safety HACCP and operations plans. If there's a concert going on, GCHD EH staff will be out there inspecting food vendors, both in the venue itself and in the Gorge campground.

What are 1-3 current EH projects or goals for your jurisdiction?

One project we'll be working on in the coming months is a collaborative effort with the Columbia Basin Conservation District to create a "Grant County Healthy Lakes Blue Green Algae Tracker". The tracker will be a citizen science project to help better inform GCHD and the public about HABs. We'll be creating a training program for community volunteers to take photos and water samples at lakes that may have cyanobacteria blooms. The photos, as well as sample results and any water recreation advisories, will be uploaded to an online map so the public will have easy access to conditions and make more informed water recreation decisions. We plan to start the tracker program with Moses Lake which is known to have HABs every year and over time expand to all of Grant County. The tracker will be launched next year in time for summer.

Another thing we're excited about is the ability of to offer online payments for EH fees and applications in the near future. This has been something we've wanted to do for many years, especially due to the geographic size of our county, but our point of sale system was always a limitation that prevented it. Using FPHS funds, GCHD was recently able to upgrade our very old POS system. As an added bonus to a much more stable system, EH will now be able to finally add online payment options! We're excited to be able to provide this option for the public.

We have an amazing EH Division! I am incredibly grateful to work with a team that is knowledgeable and always willing to jump in and help out whether it's within GCHD or sharing their knowledge and working through issues with EH staff in other LHJs. We are a dedicated group that has a passion for ensuring Grant County has safe spaces to live, work, and play.

What would you like others to know more about your EH program?

Why do you work in Environmental Health?

Every day may be work in the same programs, but there are no two days alike and every day is a new opportunity to positively impact the communities we serve in very direct ways. We understand and appreciate that our work today doesn't only affect the health and safety of people today, but affects the health and safety of people in the future as well.

AEC 2023 Update

Dear WSEHA Colleagues,

Planning for the WSEHA 2023 Annual Education Conference (AEC) is well under way. Mark your calendars for May 8-10 at the Hotel Murano in the heart a revitalized downtown Tacoma. Museums, entertainment and food are an easy walk or a short rail ride from the hotel.

We are planning to share some environmental health success stories, field trips and fun social activities (cornhole, anyone?). Our hosts from Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department are already cooking up some great local content.

What do we need from you?

- Submit an abstract and prepare a presentation. The abstract portal is open through November 30: <https://www.wseha.org/2023-aec>.
- Plan to attend the conference. The main program will run Monday May 8 in the afternoon, Tuesday May 9 all day and Wednesday May 10 in the morning.
- Recruit a speaker or encourage your co-workers to submit abstracts and share great work going on in your community.
- Volunteer to help. Here are a few ways that you can help make the conference awesome:
- Join our planning Committee – Contact Megan McNelly at megan@wseha.org .
- Be a session moderator.
- Nominate a co-worker for an award.
- Suggest a plenary speaker.
- Help with audio-visual setup Sunday afternoon/Monday morning.
- Join the International Health Committee and help with auction setup, operation, raffle sales, and cleanup.
- Prepare to donate an auction or raffle item.
- Recruit a vendor or exhibitor.



If you have any questions, contact Conference co-chairs:
Tom Kunesh; tkunesh@whatcomcounty.us
Katie Lott; klott@tpchd.org

See you in Tacoma May 8-10, 2023!

Tom Kunesh
WSEHA Past-President/Conference Co-chair

