

The Alabama Environmentalist

December 2006
Issue

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- Editorials



THE ALABAMA
ENVIRONMENTALIST

*is the newsletter of the
Alabama Environmental
Health Association, Inc.
Founded in 1954, AEHA
is a professional association
of individuals working
within the field of
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AEHA is an affiliate of the
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Health Association. To
contact the editor, please call
256-236-3274, fax 256-
237-7974 or e-mail
lburell@adph.state.al.us*

AEHA, Inc.
P. O. Box 129
Fayette, AL. 35555.



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Seasons Greetings Everyone! What a year this is turning out to be! It began for me in early January with the extensive planning for the 2006 Conference. This was a labor of love and turned out ok, in my humble opinion. As most AEC's go, this one was a success by any standard. We had 147 people in attendance, collected over \$1300 through our silent auction that goes toward our annual scholarship award, had over 100 door prizes given away, 23 exhibitors/vendors, and provided more than 24 hours of educational sessions. We were honored to have the 2006 NEHA President, Captain Rick Collins as our keynote speaker. AEHA was one of the first affiliates he visited while holding this high position.

Special thanks is due to our major contributors -

**Alabama Department of Public Health - Center for Emergency Preparedness,
Alabama Department of Public Health - Lead Program,
TVA,
Bob Guthrie and Associates,
UAB,
Infiltrator Systems, and
Polylok/Zabel.**

Your AEHA Board has also been very busy with many projects. Although still in its early stages, AEHA has our first website. Lem Burell and I are planning on updating it in early 2007. Please take an opportunity to visit YOUR website at www.AEHA-online.com. This year will mark the 53rd anniversary of our founding. We look to great things, including a joint conference with ALPHA in May. I plan on striving for 100% membership for county and area offices as well as central office staff. If there is a project that you would like for the board to take on, please call me at 334-206-5375 or email me at thatch@adph.state.al.us. Remember, this is your association!

As we say goodbye to another year and anxiously await 2007, let me thank each of you for your efforts to make Alabama's environment a healthier place to live. I would also like to express my heart-felt appreciation for your support of this association. It is my goal in 2007 to provide quality educational sessions, credentialing support, and training opportunities so that the Alabama Environmentalist continues to stand above the rest. May you and yours have a very Merry Christmas and the happiest of New Years !

Keep up the great work!

Your President

Tim Hatch



Jeff McCool,
Seafood Branch
Environmental Supervisor
2006
Environmentalist of the Year

AEHA's annual **Environmental Health Week** recognizes the roles and importance of all environmental health professionals in the state. Governors from George Wallace to Bob Riley, seen here at the left with members of the 2005 AEHA Board, have annually proclaimed Environmental Health Week.

April 22 -28 will be the 2007 Environmental Health Week.



My Career at The Baldwin County Animal Control Center By Charlotte Plumb

I began my career with the Baldwin County Health Department in 1987 as a Public Health Environmentalist. At that time, Baldwin County was still relatively small and as an environmentalist, I did a little bit of everything but mostly I was involved in the food program. We stayed busy. The work and my experiences were varied and we faced new challenges on a more and more frequent basis as our little county began to grow. If, however, you had told me at that time that my job one day would entail managing an animal shelter I would have said you were crazy. Well, guess what!

In 2003, an agreement between the Baldwin County Commission and the Baldwin County Health Department transferred the management of the Baldwin County Animal Control Center to the Baldwin County Health Department. So, with absolutely no training in shelter management, I began a new adventure in my career (and life!). At this time the shelter was staffed by one animal control officer, one clerk, one manager, and approximately five kennel technicians. After a few months, only the Animal Control Officer remained. Currently, the shelter staff has grown to include two clerks, two animal control officers, 2 animal / vector control technicians, and 6 kennel technicians. When we took over the shelter in 2003, we faced the continuing problem of too many pets and too few suitable homes. We immediately began searching for a solution to reduce the number of stray animals that were being euthanized in our shelter. In 2004, we began a spay/neuter program. This means that all animals that were adopted from our shelter are spayed or neutered before they go home. If they are too young, the adopters receive a certificate to have the surgery done when the animal is older. We have contracts with several veterinarians

Continued on page 3

Announcing the 2007 AEHA Annual Education Conference

May 16 – 18, 2007 at the RSA Riverview Hotel in Mobile, Alabama. AEHA is pleased to be holding a joint conference with the Alabama Public Health Association. Many great topics on environmental health and public health are planned. Room reservations can be made by calling 1-866-749-6069. Guest rates for the nights of May 15 – 17 are \$115 single or double occupancy (\$125 for three adults; \$135 for four adults) per night. <http://www.riverviewmobile.com/>



Environmentalists from all across the state of Alabama were in attendance at the 2006 Annual Education Conference in Florence, Alabama in July. Gary Hodge, Chuck Rhodes, and Jeff Black (pictured at left) are seen here visiting between sessions at the AEC.

North Alabama was a great host location for this annual event. The Shoals is a tourist hot spot and AEHA was lucky to host one of the first conferences held at the Florence Conference Center.

AEHA BOARD NOTES

1. By the end of the February chapter meetings, all chapters should have their nominees in place for the Environmentalist of the Year and Ansel Mullins Awards. The deadline for Awards submittals for these nominees is March 15, 2007. Awards should be submitted to Tim Hatch, President, AEHA, Inc., c/o Bureau of Environmental Services.

2. **DEADLINE** for members to re-new their membership for 2007 at the rate of \$15 is March 30, 2007. Membership is \$20 for new members or former

members, including those who fail to renew by March 30.

3. On December 6, 2006, Wanda Edberg-Cotter resigned as President-elect of the Association. The BOD, upon recommendation of Tim Hatch, has decided to leave this position vacant until the next annual business meeting on May 18, 2007.

4. After the current round of Chapter Meetings is completed in February and March, the next educational event for AEHA will be the Annual Education Conference, May 16-18, 2007. May 16 will be a day dedicated to legal issues with our Office of General Counsel.

The next round of Chapter Meetings will be in February 2007. Topics will include an overview and introduction to the newly created Onsite Standardization Program from the Bureau of Environmental Services and a Food and Lodging update from the new Branch Director.

Meeting dates will be:

- February 20 Northern**
- February 21 East Central**
- February 22 West Central**
- February 27 Southeast**
- February 28 Southwest**

(Locations are to be determined.)



Animal Control—continued

in the county who perform the surgeries and any other vet services that we may need. Since our policy has been in effect, the State of Alabama has passed a law requiring that all animals adopted at shelters in Alabama be spayed or neutered. We work closely with the Baldwin County Humane Society and animal rescues throughout the country in order to find homes for many of our animals. Despite all our efforts, around 7,000 animals enter our shelter each year and over 4,000 are euthanized. Last year, Alabama passed a law allowing shelter employees to euthanize animals by injection. Three of our employees, including myself, are certified to humanely euthanize animals by injection. Four more are in training.

Since the Health Department has taken over the animal shelter, we have started the spay/neuter program, euthanasia by injection, worked with State Personnel to establish a new job classification for shelter and vector control employees, and are currently working toward building a new state-of-the-art shelter. On a personal note, I have added 3 more dogs, 2 goats, and 2 cats to my family since I started at the shelter. I have also fostered up to 13 dogs at my house at one time. I have also gained weight and contemplated taking up smoking and drinking.

The worst thing about working at an animal shelter is developing a bond to all of the animals and knowing that most will never make it out of the shelter alive. It is not fair to the animals to keep them at a distance. Even if their life is short, they deserve love.



"You should check your e-mails more often. I fired you over three weeks ago."

"Even if their life is short, they deserve love"

*Charlotte Plumb
Baldwin County
Animal Control
Center*



AEHA's 2006 Ansel C. Mullins Award winner, Kristina Fox-Davis of Dale County

We're On The Web!
www.AEHA-online.com



Misty Markham (Calhoun) and Christy White (Infiltrator) at the cookout



James Congleton (PHA 1) and Pres Allinder (Bureau Director) enjoy refreshments at the AEC during a much deserved break

Photos above are from the 2006 AEC and are courtesy of John Davis, Jr. with Calhoun County

2006-2007 OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

- TIM HATCH, President, Bureau of Environmental Services (Southeast Chapter)
- VACANT, President-Elect
- JOHN DAVIS, Jr., First Vice-President, Calhoun County Health Department (East Central Chapter)
- HENRIETTA PETERS, East Central Chapter Chair, St. Clair County Health Department
- LYNN SISCO, Northern Chapter Chair, Jackson County Health Department
- CINDY GOOCHER, South East Chapter Chair, Montgomery County Health Department
- CHAD KENT, South West Chapter Chair, Public Health Area 9
- LONNIE PRESSLEY, West Central Chapter Chair, Jefferson County Department of Health
- TRINA GRIFFIN, Training Branch Representative (Southeast Chapter)
- NANCY MADDOX, Secretary-Treasurer, Fayette County Health Dept (West Central Chapter)
- LEMUEL BURELL, Information Officer, Public Health Area VI, Anniston (East Central Chapter)
- TOM, JENSEN, Past President, Madison County Health Department (Northern Chapter)
- CHARLOTTE PLUMB, Past President, Baldwin County Animal Control (Southwest Chapter)

ALABAMA ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

Name _____
 Date _____
 Employer _____
 Position _____
 Corresponding Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
 E-mail Address: _____
 I wish to affiliate with the _____ Chapter of AEHA.

- Membership Fee (Check one--Make checks payable to AEHA):**
 _____ Individual New Member--\$20 Payable for new member for 2005
 _____ Individual Continuing Member--\$15 Payable for 2005 Year before
 March 30, 2005
 _____ Retired Member--\$0--Retired as Active Member in the year _____
 _____ Associate Member--\$100

**Mail To: Nancy Maddox
 AEHA, Inc.
 P. O. Box 129
 Fayette, AL. 35555.**

Please copy or complete this application and submit it with your membership fee so that our records may be kept up to date on you. Remember that by keeping your membership current without lapse, AEHA members save on annual dues, help reduce the administrative cost of sending notices and contribute to maintaining the strength, integrity and professionalism of the Association.

"There are two kinds of people: Those who do the work, and those who take the credit. Try to be in the first group; there is less competition."

Indira Gandhi

SIXTY-FIRST ANNUAL INTERSTATE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SEMINAR

**JULY 17—20, 2007
 SEELBACH HILTON CONFERENCE CENTER
 Louisville, Kentucky**

For information, contact Lem Burell at 256-236-3274 – lburell@adph.state.al.us

MORE AMERICANS GETTING TATTOOS

The American Academy of Dermatology released a study recently showing more than 36 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds have at least one tattoo. Some dermatologists are saying that better removal technologies could be a reason for this trend.

In the age group of 18- to 50-year-olds, about one in four Americans have at least one tattoo. That's up by almost 10 percent from surveys conducted in 2003.

Body art doesn't just end with tattoos. The study also found more Americans are getting body piercings. About one in seven Americans has a piercing somewhere other than the earlobe.

RETIREMENTS

Grady Myers, Public Health Senior Environmentalist and Supervisor of the Community Sanitation Division, retired from the Montgomery County Health Department after 38 years of dedicated service to the citizens of Montgomery County. Grady is to be commended for his unfailing helpful attitude. He has trained many environmentalists over the years, teaching not only how to perform the job but how to communicate with others. His wealth of knowledge will be missed by all.

Philip Wright, PH Senior Environmentalist, retired June 30, 2006, after 30 years of service with the Franklin County Health Department, Russellville. The size of his coffee cup was only exceeded by the size of his heart. Philip had a passion for his work and helping others. We will miss him (but not his UT cap!).

Ralph Fulton, an Air Pollution Engineer with the Jefferson County Health Department, retired October 1, 2006, with over 27 years of service.

John H. Miller, Public Health Environmental Supervisor, retired March 31, 2006, after 35 years of service with the Walker County Health Department, Jasper.

Donald Pugh, Area Environmental Director, Public Health Area 3, Tuscaloosa, has announced his retirement effective February 1, 2007. Don is a Past President of AEHA and Alabama Public Health Association. Don brought the first NEHA-sponsored Mid-Year Conference to Alabama in 1989 in Mobile – on onsite sewage disposal. He has been a community leader in Tuscaloosa for many years, most recently chairing the county's Local Emergency Planning Committee. If you look carefully in your travels on the highways and byways, you're bound to see Don and his wife, Sara Jane. Travelling's in their blood; and in their future plans. Best wishes, Don! And Godspeed.

IN MEMORY

Mike Cash died March 23, 2006. He was a faithful employee of the Health Department for over 36 years and known to many of us as a very good friend. Since November 1 of last year, he had dealt with pancreatic cancer and complications of the disease.

Donald Simmons passed Tuesday March 21, 2006, at the age of 72. He served as Director of Environmental Health for the Northwest Regional Health Department until retirement. Previous to that, he was employed by the Jefferson County Health Department in the 80's and served two years in the US Navy. He was instrumental in initiating an environmental enforcement program in the region, beginning the limited food programs, selling the Solid Waste programs to several counties, and instigating the Certified Installer's program. He was a member of the Sandusky Methodist Church.

Charles Ray "Charlie" Sutton, 76, of Decatur died June 26, 2006. He retired from the military and from the old "Tri-County" Health Department District in Decatur.

Marion Wilford, Jr., died August 29, 2005, in Montgomery. Marion worked 35 years with the Alabama Department of Public Health. He tirelessly assisted AEHA at numerous annual conferences and meetings. (Honk if Marion photographed you!) A member of the Capital City Church of the Nazarene, he was a recipient of the Virginia Kendrick Award of the Alabama Public Health Association and was Baptist Hospice Volunteer of the Year.

“WHERE HAVE YOU GONE JOE DIMAGGIO?”

Catching Up With a Few of Our Colleagues Who Have Gone on to “Better” Things

Contributed by Don Pugh, James Congleton, Steve Brown and Lem Burell

Richard “Rick” Smith (Lee County) is working toward a Masters Degree in Soils at Auburn University. He expects to earn the degree in August, 2007.

Ron Stutts (Past President, Shelby County & Area 5) has become a ballroom dancer in his retirement years and has been spotted waltzing with former Jeffco Health Officer Mary Ann Pass, MD. He still lives in Pelham, still golfs and makes his annual golfing trek to Crossville, TN, and dabbles in plumbing, electrical and other construction work.

Ken Sharpless (Past Sanitarian of the Year, Tallapoosa County) has earned a degree in Wireless Engineering from Auburn University.

Christie White, PSC, (Soils & Onsite Sewage Branch) retired on April 30, 2006. He is now employed by Infiltrator as a Field Representative for Alabama, Mississippi and part of Georgia. He took the position formerly held by ...

Alan Nipp (Tuscaloosa County) has moved to Memphis where he has been promoted to a Regional Representative with Infiltrator.

Charles Holland, the husband of **Betty Holland** (past Secretary-Treasurer, Tuscaloosa County), passed away this past year. Since then, Betty has devoted a lot of time as a volunteer to Hospice of West Alabama. She still has time to spend with her grandchildren and lives in Tuscaloosa.

Butler Hine, retiree from the Tuscaloosa County Health Department is still living in Tuscaloosa and stays in touch. He is an avid traveler having been to Paris, Greece, Alaska, and many times to California (where Grandkids live). He is active as a volunteer at DCH Regional Medical Center and is an example of what all retirees should hopefully be able to look forward to ... a long active life. He loves to cook, loves to play dominoes, and visit with friends. Give him a call at (205) 556-2441.

Looking Back—A Blast From the Past



The photo is not sharp and clear, but then, neither are those who are still around from this circa 1978 photo taken in Florence at a FDA “Current Concepts in Food Protection” course. But pictured here are at least three past AEHA Presidents, several award winners and numerous “characters.”

WHAT OTHER STATE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS DO:

Clandestine Drug Lab Program in Washington

From the web site www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/CDL/default.htm

What we do

The Program recognizes the need to protect future occupants from contamination of illegal methamphetamine lab chemicals, and operates under the provisions of law.

The Program certifies contractors to decontaminate properties. Staff provides technical assistance and training to local health jurisdictions, government agencies, and community organizations. Staff develops remediation policies and procedures.

Why we do it

The majority of clandestine drug labs manufacture methamphetamine. These labs are set up in motels, houses, apartments, storage units, and vehicles. Hazardous chemicals are used that can contaminate structural materials, furnishings, wastewater systems and soils. The Washington State Department of Ecology responds by removing bulk chemicals and equipment. Local Health Jurisdictions assess properties to determine the degree and extent of contamination of methamphetamine and chemical residues and bio-hazards such as hypodermic needles, feces, and blood. Proper decontamination is necessary to reduce the public health risks of injuries and hazardous exposures associated with clandestine drug labs.

How we do it

The Program sponsors a comprehensive 3-day training course to certify workers and supervisors in the remediation of contaminated properties. The course covers property assessment, decontamination techniques, work plan development and environmental sampling.

Program staff consults with local health jurisdictions on regulations and decontamination procedures. Staff conducts presentations on identification, prevention and decontamination of drug labs.

The web site also provides the following information for hotel and motel owners.

Did you know?

- Drug labs are frequently found at motels
- Motel owners are responsible for decontamination costs
- Decontamination costs average \$2,000 for a single room

What's the cost?

When drug criminals operate out of motel property, owners pay a high price...

- Property damage
- Revenue loss
- Negative publicity
- Employee turnover
- Litigation costs

By making small changes you can avoid big problems

At registration, be aware of individuals who....

- Pay with cash
- Are local residents
- Have no photo identification
- Appear to be using drugs

Security and employee training...

- Require visitors to use main entrance
- Cancel lost keys immediately
- Perform daily room checks
- Walk halls and building perimeter
- Talk with nearby motels about suspicious individuals
- Know signs of drug-related behaviors
- Be aware of chemical odors

If you discover or suspect a drug lab

- Do not touch anything
- Leave the area immediately
- Call local Law Enforcement

PONDER YOUR PUBLIC RESTROOM PERSONA

*Excerpted from a recent New York Times News Service Article by Kristi L. Gustafson
Embellished by the Editor*

Do you mummify the toilet seat in a roll of toilet paper? Do you crouch? Do you avoid them all together? Whether you admit to it or not, you have a public bathroom personality.

As we go to our annual conferences, or to amusement parks, campgrounds, concerts, stadiums and theaters – and possibly even in your own building where you work, we all must put on our bathroom personality when our body tells us that resistance is futile. And what would any vacation road trip be without the unavoidable pit stop at an interstate rest area, gas station or convenience or fast food store.

As public health professionals, we are all familiar with the germ theory of disease. And public restrooms have been called the singles bar for bacteria looking to hook up. And we all know well that colds, viruses and some other germs (but not STDs) can be transmitted in these spaces. For as environmental health professionals, we have probably all spent “quality” inspection time judging the cleanliness of many a public restroom. Most of us have probably cited hundreds of toilets, urinals and sinks as unclean. We may have even closed a place because of it.

I have come to conclude that bathroom inspectors even have inspection personalities. Some of us have had the “privilege” of inspecting public restrooms at a very large venue, like the Talladega Superspeedway, and speed-flushing every toilet to be sure that no has to endure an unpleasant bathroom experience because of a toilet that sprays like a geyser or leaks like a New Orleans levee. After a couple of hours of this, calluses can begin to form on your hand that you don’t want to have to explain to your family how they got there. Have you been guilty of inspecting by kick-starting many a public toilet with your shoe? I must confess; but as age brought on the possibility of muscle cramps when I kicked, I found the 1,000,001 reason to use a roll of duct tape. Tap that flush handle with that roll of tape, check the flush and for leaks and its on to the next stall. All this may even lead you to feel that you to wash your hands until they’re eczematic. Or you tote a paper towel in your hand to be your fomite.

But when its our time to be the end-user, how do we act? We don’t know what type of public potty persona was there before us. We may be so bacteria-conscious that we feel like we need to hold our breath or wish we were in a bubble. Men know that “other men” may miss the toilet or urinal altogether when they go the bathroom. Or they may not wash their hands, which will then let them little germs go hitchhiking as they please. Whats even worse is to be at a large event with a lot of alcohol being consumed. You can bet some of them social blunders caused by drinking will be in the public bathroom.

Many toilets and urinals today are touchless. They flush automatically. Even sink water and towel dispensing may be automatic. But we still maintain our unique bathroom personalities.

Allen P. Rathey, President of HouseKeepingChannel.com said its not the toilet seats people need to worry about as much as it is the urinal handles, sink faucet handles and door knobs. “We touch everything with our hands. We rarely touch a lot of things with our fannies. That’s why things our hands come in contact with are more likely to transmit disease.”

So where are you on the bathroom personality continuum? Are you at the end where you bring a can of Lysol and clean everything before you use it? Are you at the other end, like the septic tank pumper who fished his shirt out of the septic tank, not to put it back on, but because his lunch was in the pocket!? Chances are you are somewhere in between these extremes.

And men.... Urinals and urinal troughs require even further refinement of their bathroom personality. We need elbow room – no crowding here. If another urinal is free, you don’t walk up and use the urinal right next to one in use. And you don’t look around the room, either!

“Its imperative to maximize the personal space between you and other people,” said Dane Archer, a sociology professor. In our culture, the first man into the bathroom will take the extreme left or right toilet, leaving ample space for others, she said. “Its largely fencing off the desire not to be unnecessarily close during the act. These are unwritten laws passed down from the sense of observation.”

Noted travel author Arthur Frommer, who wrote “Where to Stop & Where to Go: A Guide to Traveling with an Overactive Bladder in the United States,” related a story where he and his five-year old granddaughter were walking around New York City when suddenly she announced to him she had to go to the bathroom – now. He said there was no large hotel or major retail store around. So he dragged her into a dingy-looking bar, slapped down a dollar, bought a Coke and opened the men’s room for her. After all, when you gotta go, you gotta go!

The New York Times List of PUBLIC BATHROOM DO'S AND DON'TS

DO

- First things first: Check for toilet paper.
- Share toilet paper with the person in the next stall if asked.
- Seek out personnel and find out if another bathroom is available if you are turned off by the appearance of one bathroom.
- Seek professional help if your inability to use public restrooms is hindering with your ability to function.
- Carry your own tissues or napkins just in case.
- Wipe down the seat before and after.
- Flush toilets with your foot.
- Open doors with a paper towel.
- Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.
- Bring a spray or wipe disinfectant.
- Wash your hands with hot water for at least thirty seconds before and after using the restroom.
- Use the air dryer to dry your hands.
- Finish the hand-drying process with a hand sanitizer.

DON'T

- Comment even politely on restroom odors (or try to find their source).
- Dry hands on clothing.
- Inquire about estimated exit times when waiting for a stall.
- Try to make eye contact with urinal buddies.
- Sit on a bare public toilet seat. Instead, use seat covers or layer toilet paper.
- Touch the toilet seat with your hands.
- Touch the paper towel dispenser with your hands.
- Use the first stall. That one has the easiest access and most likely the heaviest traffic.
- Use the sink closest to the toilets as it's the germiest sink.
- Touch you mouth, eyes or nose before washing your hands.

Going to the "John" for a meal ?



Your 2006-2007 Board of Directors has purchased 5 copies of the *REHS Study Guide - Third Edition (2006)* for our members to utilize. The REHS (Registered Environmental Health Specialist) credential is a nationally recognized professional certification for the environmental health field. AEHA has invested \$770 in obtaining these study guides for member use. Specifics for testing and obtaining this prestigious credential can be found on NEHA's website (<http://www.neha.org>). In order to use one of these study guides, it must be "checked out" through our educational/member services committee chairperson, Trina Griffin. Each "check out" period is for 3 weeks and must be returned to Trina so that other members can take advantage of this important study guide. Loans will be on a first come, first served basis and a waiting list will be created.

Currently, Alabama does not require registration of environmental health professionals nor does it offer any monetary award for holding this national credential. However, I encourage and challenge each of you to sharpen your skills and look into this national standard of excellence for our profession. Please use the attached REHS Study Guide Loan Application to "check-out" a copy. Remember, this loan program is a **benefit** for AEHA members **ONLY** !

Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS)

The REHS/RS is the premiere NEHA credential. It is available to a wide range of environmental health professionals. Individuals holding the REHS/RS credential show competency in environmental health issues, direct and train personnel to respond to routine or emergency environmental situations, and frequently provide education to their communities on environmental health concerns. The advantages of NEHA's REHS/RS registration program are: the nationwide recognition of the REHS/RS credential, the continual update of the REHS/RS examination and study guide based on an ongoing assessment of the environmental health field, and the tracking of individuals continuing education by NEHA

JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH ADOPTS TOUGH SMOKING REGULATIONS

The Jefferson County Board of Health approved a new rule on July 12, 2006, that will cut health ratings and force posting of warning signs in restaurants where smoking is allowed. The rule will take effect on August 1, 2006.

The board is asking restaurant owners in areas where there is no public ordinance to voluntarily ban smoking in their establishments under the new rule. Those who do not will be required to post a red and white sticker at all entrances, warning customers they are entering an environment where smoking is allowed and that secondhand smoke is a cause of cancer and other life-threatening illnesses.

Establishments where smoking is allowed will automatically have four points deducted from their health ratings for "allowing toxic or poisonous items." An additional point will be deducted if the warnings are not visible at entrances. Continued failure to post the warning could be grounds to deny a food permit, health officials said.

Board members enthusiastically passed the measure, saying the regulation will protect customers as well as workers from secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke has been linked to heart disease and lung cancer in nonsmokers. "What we'd like to do is make our environments in this community healthy for everyone," said Dr. Dennis Boulware, county health board chairman. The health department mailed out more than 3,000 letters to restaurant and eating establishments countywide notifying them of the new regulation.

The new rule comes on the heels of a report by U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona, which stated there is no safe level of secondhand smoke to nonsmokers. Even a few minutes of inhalation is harmful, the report said. Dr. Boulware said board members had discussed adopting such measures prior to the surgeon's general's report.

Several cities in Jefferson County, such as Homewood and Birmingham, have smoking bans that include restaurants. Other cities ban smoking in public places, but make it voluntary for restaurants and eating establishments. Some cities, such as Hoover and Bessemer, have no rules on smoking in public places.

George McMillan III, owner of Daniel George restaurant in Mountain Brook and president of the Birmingham chapter of the Council of Independent Restaurants of America, said many restaurants in the county are already moving to be smoke-free.

"The majority of our restaurants don't allow smoking in the premises at all," he said. "Those that do have bar businesses as well, that is where it becomes a non-lucrative business."

Boulware said owners shouldn't fear losses in revenue due to the regulations.

"In fact, some cities have found it boosted their revenues and sales because people wanted to come there because they knew they could eat without having to smoke someone else's smoke," he said.

AN ONSITE NIGHTMARE ... IN MISSISSIPPI

Excerpted and retold by the editor from an editorial by Jay Bookman, Atlanta Journal and Constitution, that was contributed by Chris Harmon, Lee Co. Health Dept.

It sounds like something out of a John Grisham best-seller. But the subdivision which shall be fictitiously called Pelican View Estates isn't fiction, and neither is its cast of characters.

Go back to the mid-'90s. A land developer in Grisham's native state of Mississippi subdivides 2,600 acres near the Gulf Coast and starts selling off lots to lower-income residents for mobile homes.

However, the Pelican View Estates also happens to contain roughly 1,200 acres of federally protected wetlands, as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers told the developer in 1996. Undeterred, the developer begins to illegally drain or fill those wetlands without a permit. He also hires an unscrupulous engineer who certifies that septic tanks on the property have been installed properly, even though he knows that many of the septic systems are sitting in wetlands and are almost guaranteed to fail. Hundreds of lots are sold, families move their mobile homes onto the property and connect them to septic tanks, and the nightmares begin.

With every major rainfall, homes are flooded; hundreds of gallons of raw sewage flow up out of toilets and run unchecked through the subdivision and into nearby streams. Families who had invested meager life savings in their lot abandon the property.

By 1997, when the Health Department raises a ruckus about sanitation problems caused by faulty septic systems, local county commissioners respond --- by attacking the Health Department. According to later court testimony, one commissioner told a Health Department staffer that the department "would either play ball with [the engineer] or [the commissioner] would cut the Health Department budget." They didn't play ball; the budget was cut drastically.

Later, when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers demand that the developer stop selling lots in the development, he agrees. Then he goes right on selling wetlands property to unsuspecting buyers.

Finally, the EPA takes the rare step of referring the case for criminal prosecution, something it does only in the most egregious of cases. The developer, his daughter and the engineer are indicted on 22 counts of violating the Clean Water Act, 18 counts of mail fraud and one count of conspiracy.

Thank goodness nothing like this goes on in Alabama.



Sal Gray (left) and Greg Locklier (right) are in a "standing room only" situation as they listen to speakers at the AEC in July.



The networking luncheon at the AEC in July was well attended. Pictured above are Phyllis Mardis (left), Sonny Williford (center), and Teddy King (right)..