

**ADVENTURES IN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH POLICY AND  
POLITICS:**

*“E x a m p l e s M o v e t h e W o r l d M o r e T h a n D o c t r i n e”*

Presented by

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Two years prior to the founding of Jamestown Colony and 15 years before the landing of the Mayflower, a band of 30 Spanish soldiers and their leader Don Juan de Oñate camped at the base of a stunning mesa of golden sandstone in west-central New Mexico. A year earlier, they had left New Mexico, crossed Arizona and then traveled south to the Gulf of California to see first-hand the extent of Spain's vast Southwest holdings.

Now they were returning home, and the cliffs of the towering mesa offered a resting place sheltered from sun and wind. More importantly, there was a deep pool of fresh water in a catch-basin at the base of the cliffs.

Before the Spaniards left the shelter of the mesa on the final miles to their capital at San Gabriel, north of present-day Santa Fe, Oñate left a record of his passing in the sandstone.

Oñate, carved in Spanish -- in part:

*"Pasó por aqui ---, Don Juan de Oñate --- 1605."*

In English, the translation reads in part:

*"Passed by here Don Juan de Oñate --- 1605."*

I will return to this seeming bit of trivia later.

I hope I am representative of innumerable environmental health practitioners who have engaged in important policy adventures.

My presentation will not bear much resemblance to the excellent structured leadership program in which you have been participating. My knowledge about politics and policy adventures is based solely on my experiences as a county sanitarian, district sanitarian, state sanitarian, chief sanitarian in a metropolitan health department, founding director of a city-county environmental health department, director of a state environmental health division, founding director of a state environmental health agency, PHS Officer, founding director of a state scientific laboratory system, state deputy secretary for health and environment, president of the American Public Health Association, state cabinet secretary for health and environment, visiting professor of public administration, senior fellow of a university institute for public policy, and adjunct professor of political science.

Associates have described me as “being out of step with my peers,” and you may recognize that trait in my policy adventures. **Some term this proclivity “thinking outside the box.”**

I apologize if my presentation sounds immodest, but as Henry Miller admonished: *“Examples move the world more than doctrine,”* and thus the title of this presentation.

All I offer are examples: not models, not steps, not formulas, not ingredients. I will summarize a number of policy adventures that may appear to be braggadocio, but I offer them as examples of the policy results of the joy of having a vision,

the joy of practicing good public relations, and the joy of leadership.

With regard to politics and policy, practitioners could profit from studying the titles and words of a spectrum of country/western songs and quotes from various individuals. For example:

*“I’m Going Someplace I Hope I Find,”*

covers essential territory in understanding and practicing policy development, policy approval and policy implementation.

And advice in the words,

*“There’s no use running if you’re on the wrong road”*

is essential for those engaged in policy ventures. Additionally, a number of instructive quotes from famous people add to the essential competencies gained from music titles.

Oscar Levant opined that

*“Proactive people rise to success, reactive people get second best.”*

And regarding thinking outside the box, Walter Lippman noted,

*“Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.”*

Robert Frost knew that taking the right road is essential and noted:

*“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by,  
and that has made all the difference.”*

And then there is the matter of persistence. Frank Clark stated,

*“If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere.”*

Those engaging in public policy adventures will invariably meet with as many obstacles and defeats as successes. Some obstacles and defeats have been known to necessitate unplanned changes in employment. Experiencing defeats, Winston Churchill observed that;

*“Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.”*

Another from George Bernard Shaw:

*“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are.*

*I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.”*

And another Shawism:

*“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.”*

Patience is also essential. Albert Schweitzer wrote:

*“No ray of sunshine is ever lost, but the green which it awakes into existence needs time to sprout, and is not*

*always granted to the sower to see the harvest. All that is worth anything is done in faith.*

Along the same line regarding the necessity for patience, highly regarded former CDC Administrator Bill Foege recognized that:

*“Ideas, like viruses, take time to incubate.”*

You have now endured a crash course in Public Policy 101.

But to get serious, prior to engaging in policy adventures, we first need to ensure a few precursors, including:

- ▶ a comprehensive vision,
- ▶ demonstrated leadership, and
- ▶ positive public relations.

## THE VISION

**The best way to predict the future is to invent it,** and that requires a vision. Vision statements I have reviewed from scores of agencies vary from no concept, through a useless utterance such as “Healthy People in Healthy Communities,” to a few thoughtful statements. Some acknowledge only a fragment of the tantalizing rainbow-like spectrum of a vision. This remarkable variation is due to lack of a common understanding of the potential, the benefits, and the scope of the field of practice, as well as a paucity of imagination on the part of many individuals in policy roles.

The following quote from Alice in Wonderland is instructive for all of us regarding the need for a vision:

*“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from*

*here?” asked Alice.*

*“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,”  
said the cat.*

*“I don’t much care where,” said Alice.*

*“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the cat.*

As we consider elements of a vision for environmental health, it may be that, like Alice, some practitioners just don’t care where they go. For them, it doesn’t matter whether they have a useful vision or not.

Every practitioner should be an active participant in developing and pursuing a meaningful vision for environmental health that should be more than blurred imagination. We should dream of communities:

- ▶ in which **environmental health benefits contribute substantially to:**
  - ▶ **reduced disease and disability,**
  - ▶ **lower health care costs,**
  - ▶ **enhanced community economic vitality,**
  - ▶ **enhanced productivity,**
  - ▶ **enhanced community educational achievement,**
  - ▶ **fewer social problems, and**
  - ▶ **enhanced quality of life in a more livable environment.**
- ▶ in which the public considers environmental health to be an important entitlement for the common good,
- ▶ in which environmental health problems are

measured and defined prior to designing and implementing programs,

- ▶ in which environmental health is based on sound risk assessment and epidemiology, as well as the primacy of prevention,
- ▶ in which ecological considerations are embraced as components of environmental health because, in the long run, a deteriorating environment is a threat to public health and the economy,
- ▶ in which environmental health practitioners have the capacity to effectively address community environmental health problems,
- ▶ in which practitioners, the public, the media, and public policy makers constantly travel broad two-way environmental health communication bridges, and
- ▶ in which public and private sector officials seek the input of environmental health practitioners prior to developing policy and taking actions that impact environmental health.

If environmental health practitioners and community leaders embrace the foregoing as important components of a vision for environmental health, then policy, goals, objectives, program design and priorities will be developed to achieve the vision.

**Developing and pursuing such a dream is a continuing journey rather than a destination.** It is not a single step exercise for a staff meeting or retreat.

## LEADERSHIP

**When a leader and a dreamer work hand in hand, or better still, when the dreamer is also a leader, significant achievements can be made.** Some term this the process of converting vision into reality through leadership. Many outstanding environmental health leaders consistently exhibit the capacity to earn the recognition and respect of their peers, as well as the public and elected officials. Many others are content to simply complain. So what leadership traits are necessary to convert vision into reality?

Here are a few traits and practices of scores of outstanding environmental health leaders:

- ▶ They constantly pursue that coherent vision that provides a platform on which to base and market their mission, their goals, their objectives, their programs and their policy recommendations.
- ▶ They have the capacity and confidence to apply their knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- ▶ They stand up for their beliefs, they practice persistence and resilience, and they accept the fact that **if you want a place in the sun you have to expect a few blisters.**
- ▶ They engage in controversial issues as appropriate and realize that trying to please everyone is a key to failure.
- ▶ They know that the best way to avoid criticism is do nothing, say nothing and be nothing.



- ▶ They do not rely on someone else to solve their problems.
- ▶ They understand and impact the political process rather than viewing it with disdain.
- ▶ They lead in developing public policy rather than following.
- ▶ They consistently market the comprehensive benefits of environmental health.
- ▶ They routinely utilize the complex array of public information possibilities to ensure support.
- ▶ They do not blame someone else for their perceived problems.
- ▶ They think outside the box, and are willing to be out of step with their peers.
- ▶ They seize the moment when they recognize an opportunity.
- ▶ They understand that support must be developed the old fashioned way: They earn it!

And perhaps most importantly, **they have learned to trust their instincts!**

Effective environmental health leadership is profoundly complex, frequently controversial, and invariably the result of individual capacity and initiatives. Many of our great environmental health leaders have been dedicated individuals who achieved eminence not because they had the right pedigrees or belonged to the right organizations, but because they had the right vision, the right information and the right leadership at the

right time. As noted previously, environmental health practitioners have a solid record of achievement in a wide spectrum of roles in a variety of public, private and academic organizations. But many environmental health practitioners appear reluctant to engage in the controversies inherent in policy development. Most leadership positions do not offer career protection beyond the ability of an individual to earn the continuing respect and support of peers, subordinates, the public, the media and elected officials.

Leadership on the road to improved environmental health is not an easy route. **Only dead fish move with the current.**

In a lighter vein, you are already aware that virtually all of the principals and most of the practices of leadership are well known to children by the time they enter mid-school, learned as they participated in games and were programmed to respond to bells and whistles before concepts and ideas. Almost any concept of leadership that is reduced to plain English elicits the response, "Oh yeah, I knew that." Everyone knows these things because they have already been led. As adults, they learn that:

- ▶ **Real leaders must be lovable.** Staff will customarily perform for money, but they only knock themselves out for love.
- ▶ **Real leaders must be ruthless.** A common observation is that leaders must be prepared to sell their grandmothers if this will further the mission of the organization. Because people who are both lovable and ruthless are relatively rare, real leaders are

not common.

- ▶ **And, real leaders must be independently wealthy.** The leader who is unduly concerned over a mortgage or educating children is usually in no position to hang tough when the situation becomes intolerable. In the private sector, the stock option helps. In the public sector, the protection afforded by a personnel system may be preferable to no system. In academia, tenure is questionably preferable to no tenure.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

Abraham Lincoln stated that:

*“Public sentiment is everything, with it nothing can fail, without it nothing can succeed.”*

Public relations must rank high among the activities of any agency. An environmental health program will not achieve optimal results in the absence of good public relations.

Public relations are nothing less than the sum total of all the conditions, attitudes, impressions, and opinions that constitute the relationships between the public and the agency. **Public relations are a reflection of everything an agency does** – the manner in which a visitor is greeted, the way the telephone is answered, the appearance of the office, behavior within the office, the cleanliness and maintenance of automobiles, the manner in which employees dress, the knowledge and competence of staff members, the efficiency and effectiveness of personnel, the type and quantity of public information, the content and appearance of educational material, the quality of

the correspondence, the ability to speak interestingly about services, the skill in answering criticism, and sharing news about the daily activities of the agency.

The public relations program will be most successful when all personnel understand its importance and participate freely.

Friendly and favorable media are vital factors in creating public interest and good will, and in establishing a climate in which an agency can carry on its work most effectively. Because positive public information can be so rewarding, proper media relations are especially important.

Getting and staying in the news is not the easiest part of public information program, but it is well worth the effort for the effect is cumulative. A single "break" in the media will not bring the public to your doors. Remember, too, that one unfavorable story or unhappy event will not ruin an agency's reputation. Public impressions are built over a long period of time.

Many environmental health practitioners have been suspicious of the media and afraid to be open and work with them. This results in a negative type of public information program, as the media may not gather any news about the agency unless it is bad news, or the media only obtains news in response to direct questioning of department personnel. A few other suggestions:

- ▶ **Encourage numerous personnel to be involved** in the public information program. This will lead to more interesting articles, more stories, more human

interest, and better public relations.

- ▶ **Build and promote the department instead of an individual.**
- ▶ Include editors and news directors in the department's mailing list of key community leaders.
- ▶ Reporters prefer to write their own stories and receive information direct. News media receive uncounted numbers of "canned" news releases, and these frequently go unnoticed. **The personal touch is much more effective.**
- ▶ Everything in an official agency should be open to the media unless specifically legally prohibited.
- ▶ Make frequent contact with reporters covering your agency or functions. Go out of your way to impart information.
- ▶ Develop a calendar or timely seasonal information items.
- ▶ Have coffee with reporters, and tell them of your needs and problems as well as your successes.
- ▶ For major issues, request a conference with news editors to gain editorial understanding and support.

Do such things routinely and develop sound media relationships rather than expecting immediate support during an unforeseen emergency or adventure into the realm of controversial public policy.

**Environmental health is the public's business**, and will not be properly understood or supported in the absence of continuing

public information to the media, target groups, citizen groups, professional groups, elected officials, and other agencies involved in the field of environmental health.

I cringe when I hear about the mythical “invisible profession,” as I find this “invisibility” unbelievable. If a given program or agency is “invisible,” practitioners should re-evaluate their own attitudes and efforts. **The fault is invariably with the messengers rather than the messages.** For years, my various agencies were extremely visible. We had TV, radio and print media messages emanating from a variety of departmental personnel several times weekly. Environmental health is of profound interest to the public. Blaming the media is often a feeble excuse, but other factors may be involved in a paucity of visibility. These include:

- Organizational settings that preclude support, understanding, emphasis and visibility for environmental health,
- Organizational policies that preclude environmental health personnel being encouraged to practice good public information,
- Practitioners not understanding and marketing the comprehensive benefits of environmental health, and
- Practitioner inability to articulate and pursue a comprehensive vision of environmental health.

## **VENTURING INTO PUBLIC POLICY**

Now that we have a vision, leadership and sound public relations, we may be prepared to deal with public policy

officials. Policy is developed at all levels of the public and private sectors, but the most important policy issues are the responsibility of elected officials. Legislative bodies determine budgets, staffing, facilities, and legislation required for all activities. Those approaching legislative bodies who have not developed a vision, who are not known for leadership, and who have not practiced good public relations will probably not be successful in their policy quests.

A few thoughts about venturing into environmental health policy:

- ▶ **Politics determine who gets what, when and why. The results are policy.**
- ▶ Every policy issue is deemed "critical" by someone, so justification must be specific as to how the action will impact that status of environmental health in the individual politician's area.
- ▶ Legislative matters are determined mainly by legislative committees, and lobbying efforts should be targeted primarily to committee members. Staff members often play key roles in influencing committee members.
- ▶ Elected officials focus primarily on the needs and desires of their own constituents. A case must be made to indicate the impact of the policy recommendation on such constituents.
- ▶ Elected officials are much more **likely to be influenced by thoughtful, individually worded letters** rather than by "canned" letters and postcards

that are usually ignored as obviously emanating from a single source.

- ▶ Requests will be more effective if the practitioner indicates the specific environmental health problems (indoor air, community air, safe drinking water, water pollution, food, industrial hygiene, vector control, noise pollution, land use, radiation, solid wastes, hazardous wastes, toxic chemicals, etc.) being impacted and the effect on the constituents' multiple benefits of environmental health.
- ▶ Make every attempt to **relate the impact of the action to one or more of the benefits of environmental health previously listed.**
- ▶ Practitioners who have developed an ongoing relationship with elected officials rather than waiting for a perceived "emergency" are more likely to have their requests considered.
- ▶ Practice public relations with your elected officials. Many practitioners disdain what they consider "politics," but outreach to politicians helps them understand and address the needs of their constituents. Meet elected officials in person. Give them tours of their districts identifying environmental health problems that have been ameliorated or need action. Create maps of their jurisdictions indicating the locations of environmental health problems.
- ▶ Elected officials receive masses of requests daily, so only the well justified requests will be seen by the politician rather than by some aide.



A sample of my early policy adventures involved such issues as air pollution, radiation exposure, housing conservation and rehabilitation, urban renewal, land use, water supplies, liquid waste disposal, occupational health and safety, water pollution, municipal annexation, agent orange disposal, the Council on Environmental Quality, a DDT fiasco, outrage over a paper mill, disposal of shoe-fitting fluoroscopes, banning plastic garment bags lacking warning labels, controversy over uranium milling, solid waste management, prohibiting smoking in agency buildings long before such policy became the norm, as well as the creation of several agencies.

Considering time limitations, I can discuss only a sample of my policy adventures.

### **The Municipal Health Act**

Early New Mexico law specified that "municipalities and school districts may employ their own health or sanitation personnel, but they shall report to, and render such reports to the District Health Officer as he may deem necessary." I ignored this provision as our funding was from the city, and the department was part of city government just as certainly as were all other city departments that were not required to report to state government.

But this law was creating turf jealousy for a series of district health officers who, believing in textbooks and tradition, thought they should supervise the city's environmental health functions even though none had adequate education or experience in

environmental health. Each of these district health officers ended their New Mexico careers by resigning in frustration. I was not their favorite lackey.

### **It was time for a policy adventure!**

I developed a bill that moved through the legislative process with no apparent opposition, until the State Health Officer decided it was a serious threat to his turf. After over-imbibing at a dinner, he smilingly advised, "*Larry, I'm going to pull the rug out from under you!*" The municipal health bill afforded him this opportunity. He managed to have the bill recalled to committee in order to bury it. I contacted a number of influential private sector individuals. With their support, the bill was again given a "do pass" by committee, enacted by the Legislature and signed by the Governor.

The State Health Officer subsequently submitted nine questions to the Attorney General designed to elicit interpretations that would weaken the Act. The AG's responses were all favorable to the interests of municipal government.

### **The Nation's First Environmental Health Department**

Nineteen sixty-five was long before the public developed interest in environmental health issues. The only significant interest was that of environmental health practitioners. I appointed a blue ribbon, seven-member Advisory Committee, later gained enactment of an advisory board ordinance, and did not have a single request or nomination for someone to serve on the board! Therefore, the city manager appointed those that I recommended.

This was prior to Earth Day, public awakening, the creation of EPA, and the passage of major Federal and State environmental legislation.

Working with the County Manager, I developed a proposal to have the surrounding county contract with the city for all environmental health services. The contract was submitted as a joint powers agreement and approved by the County Commission, the City Commission, the State Board of Health and the State Board of Finance.

The result was the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department – **the first such entity in the nation!**

Earlier, I developed several new environmental health ordinances for the City. For the county, I developed the County Environmental Health Code, which was a comprehensive document encompassing such issues as subdivision requirements, water and sewage standards, swimming pool sanitation and safety, milk sanitation, food protection, air pollution control, and meat inspection.

## **Air Pollution Control in Albuquerque and New Mexico**

Topography and meteorology had long made Albuquerque a natural for air pollution in winter months.

I developed an arrangement with the Public Health Service to continuously sample air for particulates, including chemical

composition. The PHS furnished monitoring equipment and analysis. The news media cooperated by portraying the results. I frequently met with various community and professional groups to discuss the problem and indicate the need for controls. Point sources were still common, and open-burning of wastes, refuse, weeds, and agricultural stubble was widespread.

I worked with a reporter who wrote a series of front page feature articles that accurately described the problem and the need for an effective approach. I commenced developing a new ordinance. The county commission also became interested in developing an ordinance.

Following extensive public information, we scheduled a public hearing on the proposed ordinance. We had a large, practically empty room. Those in attendance included one newspaper reporter, one TV cameraman, and two of us from the Department. I proceeded with preliminary efforts to schedule the proposed ordinance for commission action.

### **Then the sky fell in!**

I was invited by representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and the Industrial Development Service to attend a closed-door session. They angrily urged me to back off, and advised me that to even talk about air pollution in Albuquerque would devastate the economy and drive industry out of the area. One even suggested that **I should be "tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail."**

It was not a pleasant experience! But, as Winston Churchill admonished, *"If you are going through hell, keep going."*

I scheduled the ordinance for action by the city and county commissions. Both adopted the ordinances within a few months.

I then worked with the State Division of Sanitary Engineering and Sanitation to develop a State law. The first bill was introduced by a Representative who caught so much pressure from polluting interests that he dropped sponsorship and the bill died in committee.

In the next session of the legislature, a Senator introduced the bill again, but dropped sponsorship due to the pressures of power plants in his jurisdiction.

Next, I requested another Senator to sponsor a bill, and it actually moved to a hearing before the Senate Conservation Committee. At this hearing, Senators said they thought air pollution was green: the color of money. The hearing rapidly deteriorated as other senators laughed me out of the room. I was not sure if there was a formal "do not pass" vote, **or if they just reported out the laughter!**

Subsequently, a group of industry officials developed a draft bill that was extremely weak and polluter oriented. They submitted it to the State Board of Public Health for endorsement. Board members were so pleased that the bill provided for enforcement by the State Department of Public Health that they failed to notice its weaknesses. The Board unanimously endorsed the draft bill. That inappropriate endorsement precluded the state-level Sanitary Engineering and Sanitation staff from opposing or attempting to improve the measure and meant that I was the only

advocate having the freedom to push for a stronger and more effective measure.

I then requested introduction of a measure I had drafted. It passed the Senate with little opposition. But the groups opposing it had decided to deal with it when it moved to the House. A committee substitute was passed out of the first house committee.

But the pollution interests showed their muscle. At one hearing, the chair said he needed to leave the room for a few minutes and would just turn things over to the industry lobbyist, who was an excellent lobbyist and respected adversary. At a joint House-Senate Committee hearing, an environmental activist (the first I had come across), said that he would rather *“live in a cave and use candles than tolerate the Four Corners Power Plant.”* That statement certainly didn't help my cause, and engendered a huge smile on the face of the president of the Neanderthal-minded power company.

Following many hearings and compromises, a good bill was developed, and signed into law. Politics is indeed the art of compromise.

I was equally involved in development and enactment of the New Mexico Water Pollution Control Act during the same legislative session. The intrigue was basically the same as it was for the air act. Both final products were good legislation. The legislative process worked after several failed attempts in three previous legislative sessions.

**Solid Waste Adventures: One of My Many Failures.**

City commissioners thought the Environmental Health Department was doing such an excellent job that they transferred the Refuse Department to Environmental Health without consulting me. I never believed that Environmental Health should administer direct services, but this did provide memorable adventures.

One of the adventures was an idea whose time had not arrived. I contacted every unit of local government, every school district, and pueblos in the region regarding area-wide solid waste management problems and developed an area-wide solid waste management plan. I contacted the solid waste management people in the Public Health Service and described our proposal. They professed to be eager to fund such an area-wide program as a demonstration project for other areas of the Nation.

The PHS had already utilized our department for other demonstration projects, including development of their methodology and resultant publication for community environmental health planning. Working with the PHS, I had previously directed the nation's First Governor's Conference on Environmental Health Planning. And as a PHS Commissioned Officer, I had been among those responsible for radioactive fall-out monitoring and protection during atomic testing in Nevada.

Our plan involved creating a solid waste management district with initial financial contributions from the afore-listed local governments with the bulk of funding to be received from the PHS in accordance with an oral commitment. Solid waste transportation was to be based on using the some 50 miles of

existing railroad tracks, with refuse trucks feeding into this system.

I convened a meeting of all regional local government officials at which all signed an initial agreement to participate financially. **Local enthusiasm was high.** I again contacted the PHS solid waste management officials, as we were ready to go. But by then there had been a change in federal priorities and they declined to fulfill their earlier commitment.

An excellent idea, good planning and excellent local support, but withdrawal of the promised federal support resulted in no further area-wide solid waste management efforts.

The city refuse department also provided other adventures. The personnel were politically formidable, and to a significant extent controlled operations. They had an effective "buddy" system that protected them from unwanted interference. I found that the crews of the large and expensive-to-operate refuse vehicles completed their routes early in the day and spend the rest of the working day driving around appearing to be busy. On one occasion, I observed a crew parked on a side street drinking beer. These practices not only resulted in exorbitant personnel costs, but in high mileage costs. I started transferring crew members to different crews, and changing some day crews to night work. I paid for this by repeatedly receiving **anonymous calls threatening to kill me, injure my family members and rape my wife!**

The results of my changes were short-lived. At that time, I was invited to become Director of the Environmental Services Division of the New Mexico Health and Social Services



Department. Following my resignation from city government, the entire solid waste system and assignments reverted to previous arrangements within a week after I left. The results were comparable to sticking my hand in a bucket of water and then withdrawing it. The water level did not permanently change! Perhaps Bill Clinton was instructive when he reputedly said, *"If we don't succeed, we run the risk of failure."*

But, a leader must learn to go from failure to new adventures with no loss of enthusiasm.

### **Recognition: The Joy of Achievement**

Environmental health achievements and progress during those years would have been impossible without continuing media support. **Seldom did a week go by without several articles** appearing in the press, as well as radio and television interviews and announcements. The media were positive and constructive in their support, and this was a major factor enabling the Environmental Health Department to achieve, be creative and have a feeling of broad-based community support.

The Albuquerque National Bank devoted an entire issue of the publication Albuquerque Progress to the Environmental Health Department, distributed it to those on their mailing list, and provided an additional 10,000 copies to the Department for further local and national distribution.

The quality of programs also gained the department extensive national recognition. A number of Department personnel were asked to serve on various national professional and policy

committees. The CDC repeatedly requested that I participate in various environmental health training courses.

But the scores of **complimentary letters received by the department over the years were even more rewarding.** We were able to attain significant improvements in every program with less than a half-dozen court cases. The following excerpt from a letter from an industry consultant is instructive:

It is most refreshing in today's world of constant legal proceedings, that administration of a complex and vital department such as yours can be accomplished without the hard-nosed approach.

I personally feel the key is effective communications. Your department has done an outstanding job in this respect; people know what to expect and when; they are treated fairly, but expected to comply. **This is much more conducive to compliance than spotty hit or miss enforcement.**

The "At City Hall" column in the Albuquerque Journal stated, in part:

Although the word had leaked down from Santa Fe to a few big ears in City Hall, most employees there were surprised at the news of	But Gordon is <b>strictly</b> an environmental health man and the idea of switching careers at age 40 didn't appeal to him. Gordon is well	And unlike some others, he is not particularly hurt if he does not get his name in the paper. The fact of the matter is that
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<p>Health Dept. Director          Larry Gordon's          resignation to take a          similar job with the          state. It was even sort of          a shock to City          Manager G.B.          Robertson, who thought          that Gordon would stay          with the city when all          was said and done.</p>	<p>respected by Robertson,          fellow department          heads and those city          commissioners who          know of his          department's growth          and most of the rank          and file within his own          office to whom he          seems somewhat          distant.</p>	<p>Gordon's name appears          less frequently than the          names of some of his          staff.</p>
<p>But Gordon's move          was no sudden decision          even though he had          turned down plenty of          other job opportunities          in recent years. One of          those opportunities          came more than a year          ago when Robertson          asked him how he'd like          to become assistant city          manager.</p>	<p>Unlike some          department heads who          are willing to delegate          responsibility but hold          tight to authority, he is          willing to delegate with          the result that <b>his chief          subordinates make          major decisions on          their own as Gordon          believes they should.</b></p>	<p><b>Professionalism is          Gordon's by-word</b> as          everyone who works for          him knows and Gordon          believes the city's          prestige has grown          greatly through his          department's efforts in          the environmental          health field.          No one will argue with          the proposition that the          city will lose no dud          when it loses Larry          Gordon.</p>

When I left the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department, we had developed a highly respected, nationally recognized, professionally staffed city-county department. We had significantly increased staffing. Activities included food sanitation, pure food control regulating all food processors within New Mexico that shipped into Albuquerque, milk sanitation regulating all dairies and milk plants in New Mexico that shipped into Albuquerque, safe drinking water, liquid waste disposal, air pollution control, cross-connection control, swimming pool safety and sanitation, housing conservation and rehabilitation, animal control, subdivision control, meat and slaughterhouse inspection,

radiation protection, industrial hygiene, insect and rodent control, and solid waste management. We had also promoted, designed and spawned the City Urban Renewal program and had been significantly involved in developing the Model Cities program and the Low-rent Leased Housing Program.

Those were years of progress and satisfaction!

### **The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

By 1970, the public and many political leaders had become increasingly concerned about environmental deterioration. Instant activists, sometimes called "**Tang Ecologists,**" **literally came out of the woodwork.** They were sometimes supportive, frequently disruptive, occasionally knowledgeable, and often woefully misinformed. But they did provide some balance to the efforts and political power of major polluters. Sometimes they made our efforts easier, often more difficult. **They rapidly became a political force to be reckoned with.**

The primary federal responsibility for environmental health was lodged in the Consumer Protection and Environmental Health Service of the Public Health Service, except that water pollution control was in the Department of Interior, pesticide regulation was in the Department of Agriculture, and food protection was in the Food and Drug Administration.

The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held hearings regarding environmental problems and organizational approaches. The committee was concerned that the **PHS was more interested in research than rapid action** to address the nation's environmental ills. One prominent Sanitary Engineer

had noted that the Public Health Service had left environmental health *“halfway between leprosy and the quarantine station.”*

As Chair of the American Public Health Association Section on Environment at the time, I scheduled a meeting with the staff of President Nixon’s Advisory Council on Executive Organization. Along with numerous other special interests, I testified and made a series of recommendations on behalf of the APHA Section on Environment.

When President Nixon created EPA by Executive Order, many of our recommendations were heeded, but EPA was not as broad in programmatic scope as we had recommended. But perhaps we kept EPA from being assigned to the Interior Department, as this would have been a blatant conflict of interest – pairing EPA with programs devoted to resource utilization.

**EPA is a public health agency.** Few of its programs would be authorized were it not for their public health bases.

### **The New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency**

Until 1970, organization of state environmental health services had not been of concern to the public. Public and political clamor throughout the nation helped instigate a widespread re-evaluation of environmental problems, program goals, program scope, program methodology and effectiveness, fiscal support and legislation, as well as program organization and institutional arrangements. Without much real study or understanding, **programs in many states were shifted to new and/or different agencies for a variety of reasons** – some valid, some questionable and some irrational.

Sometimes it was change for the sake of change. Eager environmental advocates sometimes confused change with progress. In most states, environmental health program officials exhibited a high degree of territorial defense and a relatively low titer of organizational and program management knowledge. Powerful polluter lobbyists delighted in the opportunity to retard and confuse environmental health progress through repeated reorganizations, and to place environmental health personnel and agencies in positions of greater "political responsiveness."

The EPA was touted as a model for states, and this in turn led to further undesirable program fragmentation in those states imbued with the naive desire to follow the federal "model." It was interesting to note that while the Congress approved the Presidential Executive Order establishing the EPA, practically all Congressional hearings criticized the proposal on the basis that it was not truly comprehensive.

**Unfortunately, many citizen leaders mistakenly identified air, water, and wastes as "the environment."** While air, water and wastes are important environmental health problems, they are only a portion of problems to be addressed and should not be diversified from other environmental health issues. Such diversification typically results in program gaps or duplication, competition over the environmental health program dollar, public confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies, program inefficiency and ineffectiveness, and a general disservice to the public and the environment.

In New Mexico, we were able to take a comprehensive approach. One reason was that the Environmental Services Division of the Health and Social Services Department was organized, respected and functioning effectively. Another was the division's professional staff. And another was that **we chose to be lead change** rather than defending the status quo.

While I was in O'Hare Airport one evening, I noticed the Governor-elect. I was aware that he had campaigned to institute a new organizational arrangement for environmental health programs, but I assumed he probably didn't have a precise model in mind. I had not previously met him, so I introduced myself and asked if he would be receptive to a detailed proposal. When I returned to my office, I wrote the Governor-elect listing organizational possibilities, recommending comprehensive program scope, outlining a number of basic principles, and requesting that I be named Director of his new agency.

In the next legislative session, the Governor had a State Representative contact me to discuss the program scope, organization, mission, goals, and budget for the proposed agency. The Representative decided to rely heavily on the Environmental Services Program Guide that I had previously developed, and worked with me and the Legislative Council Service to draft a bill. Even though it was 1971, there was **no environmental activist involvement or testimony regarding the bill.**

The Governor signed the bill into law, and I was appointed Director of the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency.

The statute we developed to create the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency provided the **framework for the most comprehensive state environmental health agency in the nation.** Statutory authorization was provided for programs dealing with air pollution, water pollution, food protection, milk sanitation, insect and rodent control, occupational health and safety, injury prevention, radiation protection, safe drinking water, swimming pool safety and sanitation, solid waste management, environmental chemicals, recreational environmental management, institutional environmental management, as well as hazardous substances and product safety.

### **The New Mexico Scientific Laboratory System**

The New Mexico Public Health Laboratory had been built in 1937. The facility became overcrowded, dirty and vermin infested. Equipment and supplies were in short supply, as were budget and professional capacity. Morale was low, and laboratory results were frequently of questionable validity.

I developed a proposal justifying 1) an organization to be known as the New Mexico Scientific Laboratory System, and 2) a modern, well equipped laboratory facility.

In the 1973 Legislature, I requested funding for the facility and obtained Board of Regents approval to locate it on the UNM campus. **The legislative process was not smooth or easy,** and



at one point the request was entirely deleted in a late night Senate Committee hearing. I drove the sixty miles home after midnight weary and frustrated. But early the next morning, I was back in the Capitol to get the process started anew in the House. An allocation for construction was finally authorized.

I then requested appointment as Director of the New Mexico Scientific Laboratory System in order to organize and set the mission and policies for the new organization.

My troubles had only begun when construction commenced. The architect allowed numerous cost overruns, and the State Property Control Division did not prevent or control the overruns. The project was soon out of money and I had to return to the Legislature for a supplemental request. This supplemental request certainly wasn't popular with the legislators, but additional funding was finally allocated. **It was a difficult, stressful project,** but in retrospect it was worth it. New Mexico citizens were served by one of the most modern, well equipped and best staffed laboratories in the nation.

The scientific laboratory system was, and is, unique. The organization and facility were designed to provide laboratory services to all tax-supported federal, state, and local agencies in New Mexico requiring such services on a cost reimbursement basis. Other states have individual, often inadequate laboratories serving such client agencies as public health, environmental protection, substance abuse, occupational health and safety, game and fish, family planning, medical investigator, highway traffic safety commission, etc. **By taking a**

**comprehensive approach**, we were able to provide a superior organization, facility, equipment and services for our citizens.

We improved training, quality control, organizational arrangements, supervision, client relationships, budgets, and inter-agency communication and coordination. Many states attempted to emulate the New Mexico model, but have found it impossible to overcome the influence of their pre-existing, fragmented laboratory organizations and their various "turf" imperatives.

## **FUTURE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

When considering future policy considerations, keep in mind that:

- ▶ **Environmental health is a high priority issue in our society.** It is demanded by the public, the media and political leaders, and is widely considered to be an entitlement. Leaders should take advantage of the magnitude and societal importance of their field of practice.
- ▶ Environmental health is a profoundly complex, multifaceted, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of practice engaged in by scores of disciplines and professions within a broad array of public and private organizations. **It is not a profession, but a field in which to practice one's profession.**
- ▶ Ninety to ninety-five percent of state level environmental health activities are assigned to agencies other than health departments, and there is a

similar trend at the local level.

- ▶ At the state level, environmental health expenditures and numbers of personnel account for roughly 50% of the field of public health practice and is, therefore, **the largest single component of the field of public health.**

Many individuals in the public health establishment tend to view environmental health as a minor and frequently controversial single activity, rather than a major spectrum of essential programs of community and indoor air quality, food protection, safe drinking water, solid and hazardous wastes, toxic chemicals, housing hygiene, water pollution control, industrial hygiene, noise pollution control, ionizing radiation, land use planning, vector control, and global environmental health problems.

Considering the foregoing, **challenging policy adventures await future leaders.**

Among current policy challenges, consider the following:

### **Policy for Marketing Analysis and Research**

Marketing analysis and research would significantly improve the practice of environmental health. Marketing analysis and research are universally utilized by the private sector, but have been ignored as essential tools to achieve the objectives of environmental health.

Environmental health is valuable, **environmental health is essential and environmental health is marketable.** However, effective marketing analysis and research have not

been conducted for the field of environmental health. The market has not been analyzed and understood, and marketing efforts have been launched with no defined targets in sight and have failed to reach and effectively impact the market.

Many practitioners view marketing and market analysis research tools with disdain. **Many confuse marketing with public relations.** News releases, pamphlets, leaflets, media appearances and other similar tools are valuable, but are not marketing.

*Marketing analysis and research are the functions that link the public to the marketer through information designed to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; that generates, refines and evaluates marketing actions; and that improves marketing as a process.*

A simple definition of marketing for the field of environmental health is:

*The process of planning and executing the conception, the promotion, and the distribution of ideas and services that satisfy environmental health objectives.*

However, marketing efforts in the absence of prior marketing analysis and research usually results in expensive and ineffective shotgun approaches rather than targeted effective approaches. It is implementation without planning, **or unsatisfactory orgasm without necessary foreplay.**

Agencies such as the NCEH, EPA, HRSA and FDA should cooperatively contract for a national marketing analysis and

research strategy that would provide an effective tool for state and local environmental health agencies to better serve the public.

For a website education on marketing analysis and research, visit [www.S-M-A-R-T.com](http://www.S-M-A-R-T.com).

## Policy for Workforce Enumeration

**The magnitude of the environmental health workforce has been consistently under-reported** by every major public health workforce enumeration study for at least the past 35 years. The results portray only a fraction, perhaps five percent, of the total environmental health workforce, rather than accurately portraying it as the largest single component of public health. There is no valid reason for this biased reporting. The annual reports are funded by CDC, **and the error should be rectified by CDC.** Under-reporting has resulted in negative ramifications for environmental health in workforce development as well as inadequate emphasis and recognition of the field of practice. Accurate numbers for resources and personnel involved in environmental health have been damagingly and erroneously misrepresented to the Congress, official agencies and academic entities. **Correcting this reporting bias ranks high among important policy challenges.**

## Policy for Leadership Development

For decades, sanitary engineers provided effective leadership for sanitary engineering and sanitation programs at all levels of the public and private sectors. As the scope of the field

increased, sanitary engineers evolved to public health engineers and environmental engineers. A number of events occurred to change this established leadership pattern. First, private sector interests paid engineers at a significantly higher rate. Secondly, schools of public health prepared personnel such as sanitarians for leadership as practitioners. For another two or three decades, such personnel filled roles vacated by engineers. Schools of public health, however, oozed toward the money trail emphasizing research and health care rather than educating environmental health practitioners. Accredited environmental health programs have partially filled the vacuum for qualified practitioners, but such academic programs remain inadequate in numbers and include but a few graduate programs.

The vast majority of current practitioners are products of disciplines such as geology, chemistry, biology, law, administration, political science, social science, and economics. Such practitioners are essential partners in the struggle for a healthy environment.

**The environmental health workforce requires a spectrum of practitioners** ranging from sub-baccalaureate surveillance and inspectional personnel through masters and doctoral levels. Most policy pursuit positions will be filled by individuals possessing graduate academic credentials.

### **Policy to Embrace the Field of Practice**

Many practitioners appear to have tunnel vision with regard to the breadth, depth and values of the field of practice. Too

many feel it begins and ends in health departments, and self-imposed definitions are disturbingly narrow. Environmental health is practiced in numerous local, state and federal agencies; and voluntary and professional agencies, as well as in the private sector. **Practitioners should expand their horizons and stretch their imaginations.**

*"Environmental health is the art and science of protecting against environmental factors that may adversely impact human health or the ecological balances essential to long-term human health and environmental quality. Such factors include, but are not limited to: air, food and water contaminants; radiation; toxic chemicals; disease vectors; safety hazards; and habitat alterations. "*

Report of the Committee on the Future of Environmental Health

## Miscellaneous Policy Opportunities

- ▶ Become involved in basic environmental health prevention measures such as the planning stages of energy production, land use, transportation methodologies, facilities construction, resource utilization and product design.
- ▶ Become involved in ecological and global environmental health policies such as global warming and stratospheric ozone depletion.
- ▶ Promote irradiation of foods, including spinach, as a sound public health measure.
- ▶ Promote alternative energy measures including wind, solar, nuclear and hydrogen.
- ▶ Take steps to combine the numerous overlapping and confusing federal food protection programs.
- ▶ Insist that the Council on Education for Public Health develop relevant environmental health

practitioner accreditation requirements for schools of public health.

- ▶ Insist that the Public Health Service develop a balanced and comprehensive presentation of environmental health in the Year 2010 Health Objectives for the Nation, rather than silently accepting the current damaging imbalance.
- ▶ Inasmuch as most major environmental health programs are federally mandated, work with the Congress to enact and fund a National Environmental Health Education and Training Act to ensure a continuing supply of environmental health practitioners to meet the nation's needs.

### **THE FUTURE**

Environmental health will continue to increase in complexity, and the public will increasingly expect and demand solid policies. Demographic changes, resource development and consumption, product and materials manufacturing and utilization, wastes, global environmental deterioration, technological development, international terrorism, changing patterns of land use, population pressures, transportation methodologies, resource development and utilization, and continuing organizational diversification of environmental health services will create unanticipated policy challenges. Environmental health will continue to be basic to the health of the public and the quality of our environment. Environmental health problems, programs, and service delivery organizations will evolve in ways that are unforeseen. Anticipating and developing policies for the future of environmental health will



ensure a **bright future for those capable of such adventures.**

**For those who successfully venture into environmental health policy, perhaps you will leave a legacy of accomplishment and it will be noted:**

*“Paso por aqui.”*

**Better Living through Environmental Health**