



Chairman and Members Executive Board

American Public Health Association, 1015 Eighteenth Street, N.W. Washington, D. C. 20036

Dear Chairman and Members:

As requested, I am submitting a draft paper on the status of Environmental Health in the American Public Health Association. At the last meeting of the Executive Board, I was requested to draft a paper for discussion by the Executive Board in order to provide a starting point for the development of specifics.

I regret that I will be unable to attend the August 12-13, 1976 meeting of the Executive Board, but hope that the Board will still commence consideration of the problem of Environmental Health in APHA at that meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Larry J. Gordon, Administrator Health and Environmental Programs, State of New Mexico

DRAFT REPORT ON THE STATUS OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN THE
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

On May 14, 1970, the American Public Health Association Executive Board directed that a paper be prepared discussing the status of environmental health in the American Public Health Association.

Environmental concerns were considered a basic issue and priority within the APHA for the major part of its history. However, in recent years, there has been a distinct trend indicating that the Association is becoming the American Personal Health Association, and that environmental health interests and matters are being ignored or abdicated by default. This has been due to a number of factors, including the federal thrust toward improving medical care and sickness treatment programs within the last ten to twenty years, coupled with the fact that APHA has not actively sought to accommodate environmental programs and personnel organizationally or in terms of program activities. For these reasons, environmental concerns in APHA have diminished and environmental membership has been slipping at a time when APHA has otherwise experienced a healthy growth. APHA leaders, however, are now beginning to recognize that public health is patently incomplete without the undergirding of a strong and viable environmental component, and these leaders are now questioning what can be done in an attempt to re-establish a degree of environmental health leadership and balance within the APHA.

The concern regarding environmental health in APHA is certainly not new. This was the focus of a special report prepared by the then Engineering and Sanitation Section Chairman and others on September 15, 1960 (copy attached). Little came of the referenced report, and a further and more detailed report to the Executive Board was prepared on August 18, 1965 by a special task force on The Role and Structure of Environmental Health in APHA (copy attached).

This later report probably had some impact and may well have been one of the reasons for convening the Second Arden House Conference. We environmental health representatives attending the Second Arden House Conference failed to sway other APHA leaders regarding the need for re-emphasizing environmental components within

APHA and accommodating environmental interests organizationally and programmatically. Since then, the environmental health leadership role of the APHA has continued to decrease and environmental health leaders continue to find other professional and voluntary association mechanisms for the furtherance of their policies, views and activities. Some environmental health professionals continue an APHA relationship as a matter of duty and tradition rather than any real sense of effectiveness and accomplishment.

If APHA leaders are sincere in wishing to re-establish any semblance of environmental health leadership within the APHA, a number of matters should be considered:

1) Organization. There have been numerous feeble attempts to accommodate environmental interests on a broad scale within the APHA, but no such mechanism currently exists. At one time, the Program Area Committee on Environmental Health served, at least in part, to fulfill this purpose with reasonable effectiveness. However, this Program Area Committee was repeatedly frustrated in its approach by the authorization of other program area committees dealing with environmental matters. Following the Arden House Conference, a Council on Environment was created in substitution for the environmentalists requests for an APHA Department of the Environment, and was to provide a central focus for environmental activities within the APHA. Later, this council was also abolished. The Section structure within APHA is no better, as there are a number of APHA sections involved in environmental matters with little or no coordination. There must be a mechanism for combining or coordinating the Section on Environment, the Occupational Health Section, the Radiological Health Section, and perhaps components of the Food and Nutrition Section and the Laboratory Section.

2) APHA Professional Staff. For many years APHA had some professional staff person or persons with varying titles, who were clearly the staff environmental health leaders and identified professionally with APHA environmental health members. At one time such an individual was the Deputy Director of APHA, and provided a high level environmental

health focus and staff leadership within the Association. APHA should have a knowledgeable, experienced Deputy Director for Environment.

3) Journal of American Public Health Association. A study should be made to determine if the Journal is giving adequate balance to environmental Health as one of the two major thrusts of public health. Such Journal articles should be broad in scope, giving suitable balance to the rather traditional problems of air quality, water quality, water supply, solid wastes, radiation, housing, insect and rodent control food quality, noise, environmental injuries, and environmental chemicals as well as the more basic environmental health issues of population, energy, transportation and land-use.

4) Association Task Forces and Committees. Such task forces and committees continue to be appointed with little or no regard for environmental health membership or input. If APHA is serious about environmental health and environmental health leadership, due regard must be given to appropriate environmental health membership on task forces and committees.

5) Other Association Activities. With suitable professional environmental health staff, APHA could become more involved in sponsoring national environmental conferences, symposia, and in offering professional testimony on national environmental health policy and legislation. For example, at this time the new health planning mechanisms are being organized throughout the Nation with little or no regard for the inclusion of environmental health, without understanding the scope of environmental health and without recognizing that environmental health problems cannot be prioritized on the same priority scale with problems of health care and sickness treatment. Such input and consideration must also be utilized in conjunction with any policy development or testimony regarding national health insurance.

6) Recruitment. We are truly in a position of trying to close the barn door after the horses (members) have escaped. Perhaps it is not too late to regain some of these members and retain others with well-designed effective recruitment efforts.

The pendulum of environmental health interests is now centered more firmly

on "health" than it has been for the past ten years. Various national popular opinion polls continue to indicate that the American public feels that environmental quality efforts are one of the most serious challenges of the decade, and that the citizens are willing to pay for a quality environment. While President Ford was quoted as saying something to the effect that "We can't afford to take a chance on health", regarding the potential flu problem, he was steadfastly opposing nearly every environmental health measure existing or proposed. The American Public Health Association should take the leadership in identifying for the American public this type hypocrisy and double-talk and in proposing constructive solutions. Only through a strong environmental component can this association once again be the American Public Health Association. This will require "affirmative action for environmental health" at this stage.