Shake the Snow Globe

David Dyjack, DrPH, CIH

Annoyed commuters honk their horns. Alarmed spouse frets over my safety. Agitated reptiles snap and hiss. Through it all, I remain unperturbed. I stop for turtles—on busy roads, very busy roads. It's a matter of principle. Disruption of the status quo, my own, and some courtesy of others seem to take up a lot of my time these days, and not everyone is delighted. Let's dive into some current examples.

California's 2018 Assembly Bill 626—the Homemade Food Operations Act—is a good first example. Yes, California Governor Jerry Brown recently signed into law legislation that legalizes home restaurants. Home cooks agree to a facility inspection if there are consumer complaints. Their food must be prepared, cooked, and served on the same day and delivered within a safe time period based on the holding capacity of their equipment. Home cooks must also obtain a professional food manager certification. I'm waiting for home cooking advertisements to pop up on my iPhone as I drive the amazing Pacific Coast Highway. When I inquired about mounting objections over this legislation earlier this year, I was told by an influential voice from within the profession in California to "get over it, the world has changed." Indeed.

Articles from this weekend's New York Times report that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) Office of Children's Health Protection has placed its director on administrative leave. This move sent Twitter aflutter and served to fill my digital inbox with requests to sign onto letters demanding the director be immediately returned to the position. We declined to sign on as the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) does not comment on internal agency personnel issues. Frankly, we don't know firsthand why the office director was placed on leave. Alternately, we are unequivocally supportive of a strong and effective Office of Children's Health Protection.

There are reports from major news outlets this weekend that the U.S. EPA Office of the Science Advisor is being dissolved. Again, my inbox is full of requests to do something. NEHA's role is to not dabble in internal agency realignment decisions. On the other hand, we are adamantly supportive of effective public health decisions anchored in science. I reached out to someone I know within the agency, someone who cares deeply for the environment and health. They conveyed to me that this agency moved. While the information wasn't too not helpful, it's not the end of the world.

I can provide many other examples, such as recent Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention structural realignments, which generate panicked calls to my iPhone late at night. We also receive daily requests to weigh in on issues and make public statements on matters related to the environment and environmental health. Our policy is clear. We advocate for the profession and policies that advance effective practice. We will steer clear of individual personnel decisions and commentary on the seemingly endless federal agency reorganizations. We do, when asked, make ourselves available to agencies when they request our opinion on their plans, formally and informally. Just last week I completed a 45-minute written survey for FDA. We don't hold back. For the record, I have engaged in many terse one-on-one conversations with government leaders when their decisions harm our profession, our association's members, or our nation's health. There is a time and place.

Our membership categories were profoundly simplified in October of this year. We streamlined the categories from over 10 to down to 5. Some of you expressed unhappiness with our decision. At the same time, almost no member could explain to me the membership category they were in or the benefits associated with that category. Our staff was equally confused. Our aim is to provide you with world-class service and at the same time, be really easy to work with and understand.

Abstract submission for our 2019 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition provides yet another example of disruptive quality improvement. We have simplified the submission process and adjusted the schedule to solicit abstracts earlier in the year. We made these changes to have time to publish our final AEC program, which allows you, our members, to submit earlier in the year the proposed AEC program to those who approve your travel. With our new AEC format, we have three plenary events—two of

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ask ourselves repeatedly, “Do we have a dog

individually to explain our rationale. In every case,

principled decisions around price, quality,

member or I call the affected vendors person-

management system, and client relations

the decision, while painful to people we have

many distractors and news of

Disruption seems to be the hallmark of the

Many relationships with our long-time

management system, to name a few. We make

senior staff

the same time, a senior staff

the moment that serve to dilute focus from

our main reason for existing—you. The indi-

We had run their natural course. Over the

business partners have been sunset because

modern world. Some of it is of our own mak-

rarely, is not a surprise.

There are many distractors and news of the

moment that serve to dilute focus from our

in this fight?” and “How do our members

practitioner is our central concern. We ask

ask ourselves repeatedly, “Do we have a dog

in the world a safer (by eating insects) and more beautiful and interesting place to live. Over the last year we have

principle and membership interests, which

Our enemy is not an alignment inside a

Our adversary is not internal

does one small thing to improve the lives of creatures that make the world a safer (by eating insects) and more beautiful and interesting place to live. Over the last year we have implemented many changes and taken public positions that ensure we can provide you the support and representation you need to be effective. Not everyone is happy. Please know that our aim is at once noble and true.

Happy holidays and the best for 2019.

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A beneficiary of Dave’s roadside turtle assistance program. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.

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