

Ohio Journal of Environmental Health

2nd Quarter 2025

Recognizing the Importance of Mental Health Among Public Health Workers

In this issue...

- President's Message
- District Director Feature
- Ohio's Newest REHS Class
- Environmental Health Highlights



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President's Message

Courtney Myers, MPH, REHS
Stark County Health Department

Dear OEHA Members,

As anticipated, Ohio's biennial budget season has proven to be both active and eventful. Over the past several months, OEHA, in close coordination with Hicks Partners, has delivered multiple testimonies to advocate for the interests of environmental health and local public health funding.



With approximately a month remaining in the legislative process, the outcomes of our efforts remain uncertain. I will continue to keep you informed as final decisions are made. Please know that OEHA remains fully committed to advocating on your behalf and advancing the priorities of Environmental Health across the state.

Solid Waste & C&DD Proposed Language – House Bill 96, Senate Bill 147, and House Bill 222

Solid Waste and Construction & Demolition Debris (C&DD) have been key issues in this budget cycle—and the path forward has not been easy.

HB 96 initially included a proposal from Ohio EPA to allocate solid waste tipping fees directly to local public health. OEHA supported this measure, and I testified on our behalf. Unfortunately, that language was removed during the legislative process.

In response, Senator Reineke introduced SB 147, which included a funding mechanism through C&DD, although not to the same extent or structure as HB 96. A companion bill, HB 222, was later introduced in the House. In an unexpected development, SB 147 was ultimately revised to apply only to Seneca County.

Chuck DeJonckheere, Chair of the Solid Waste Committee, provided additional testimony on three occasions—twice before the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, and once before the House Community Revitalization Committee. While the outcome is still unknown, we are encouraged that legislators are actively considering the importance of funding for local public health. OEHA and Hicks Partners continue to engage with Senator Reineke on this matter.

Home Sewage Treatment Systems – Proposed Language in HB 96

In the final days before the House passed its version of the budget, Hicks Partners informed us of a concerning provision that had been added: a prohibition on the Ohio Department of Health from requiring a soil evaluation by a qualified soil evaluator or scientist when designing Household Sewage Treatment Systems (HSTS).

I spoke directly with Representative Peterson, who introduced the provision. He expressed concern about keeping installation costs low for homeowners and felt that online soil information was sufficient. I explained that this change could increase the risk of premature

system failure, leading to environmental harm and higher long-term costs for homeowners.

OEHA quickly engaged with soil scientists and the Association of Soil Pedologists. Eric Cherry, Chair of the Sewage Technical Committee, led the drafting of our response, which I presented to the Senate Health Committee. Hicks Partners also worked diligently to educate lawmakers on the risks and unintended consequences of this provision.

Lead Program Funding – HB 96

OEHA also testified about the concerning removal of funding for Ohio's lead prevention programs within the current version of the budget. The loss of these funding lines jeopardizes the Lead Abatement Fund and Lead Safe Home Fund. This funding is critical to Ohio's ability to prevent lead exposure and protect vulnerable populations.

Recognition of Our Technical Committees

I want to take a moment to express my deep gratitude to all of our Technical Committees. As president, I've come to more fully

appreciate the depth of expertise, responsiveness, and dedication our volunteers bring to OEHA.

Budget season moves quickly, and our committees have repeatedly stepped up—gathering research, crafting testimony, and shaping OEHA's response to rapidly evolving legislative proposals. Special thanks to Chuck DeJonckheere, Eric Cherry, Greg Putka, Scott Whittaker, and the Solid Waste, Sewage, Lead, and Food Committees for their exceptional efforts during this legislative cycle.

In Closing

More legislative updates are sure to follow as we move through the state budget bill process. Thank you all for your continued support and commitment to protecting and advancing environmental health in Ohio.

In Service,
Courtney Myers, MPH, REHS
President, Ohio Environmental Health
Association



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Recognizing Ohio's Newest Registered Environmental Health Specialists

In this section we recognize and congratulate those individuals who successfully met the standards to earn the title REHS in the State of Ohio from January 1, 2024—December 31, 2024.

- Adelaide Worline
- Alan Johnson
- Alana Demmons
- Alexander Kimball
- Amanda Harshfield
- Amelia Soergel
- Andrew Finke
- Andrew Piper
- Anne Gerhart
- Arie Pequignot
- Benjamin Cochran
- Benjamin Hickerson
- Briana Musolino
- Brooke Howell
- Cassandra Pastor
- Chance Graham
- Christopher Boss
- Christopher Coakley
- Colette Naples
- Cory Obendorfer
- Courtney Riches
- Dakota Morgan
- David Amormino
- David Wos
- Elizabeth Fisher
- Emily Cook
- Emily Schroer
- Garrett Carpenter
- Geordan Muether
- Gillian Olsen
- Gregory Stallings
- Hannah Lower
- Harrison Cohn
- Jacqueline Bolanz
- Jason Spencer
- Jennifer Barno
- Jennifer Baugh
- Jennifer Bennage
- Jessalyn Adkins
- Jonah Bilek
- Joshua Burke
- Kayla Cindric
- Kayleigh Rasper
- Kristen Sullivan
- Lauren Golden
- Leah Luli
- Lindsay Gates
- Lucas Young
- Luke Pritchard
- Madeline Dyer
- Makayla Larkins
- Mansimran Kaur
- Matthew Randazzo
- Melanie Straight
- Meranda Tripp
- Morgan Rayner
- Nana Sugden
- Nicholas Speight
- Noah Frederick
- Patrick Shanahan
- Philip Kaderle
- Phillip Cherosky
- Ryan Sturgeon
- Shawn Miller
- Stephanie Mach
- Sydney Collier
- Tania Nur
- Tatiana Burkett
- Thomas Murach
- Thomas Weigand
- Timothy Gay
- Tova Herskovitz
- Trae Gulgin
- Valerie Fletcher
- Zachary Barr

OEHA Board Transitions

During the 2025 Annual Education Conference, we welcomed several changes to the OEHA Board. We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the following individuals for their dedicated service and contributions to the organization:

- **Eric Zgodzinski** - former Treasurer
- **Emily Tyler** - former Vice President

Thank you both for your commitment and leadership—your efforts have helped shape the success of OEHA.

We are also excited to welcome the following members to their new roles on the OEHA Board:

Justin Rechichar – President-Elect. Justin is the Environmental Health Director at the

Portage County Health District. He serves on the Retail Food Safety Advisory Council and has presented at numerous OEHA conferences.

Matt Tyler – Treasurer. Matt is the Director of Environmental Health at Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County. He previously served as OEHA's Vice President from 2021–2024, OEHA Treasurer in 2025, and has contributed numerous articles to the journal.

Zoe Tyler – Vice President-Elect. Zoe currently works as an EHST at the Licking County Health Department and is a graduate of Ohio University.

We are confident that under your leadership, OEHA will continue to grow, strengthen, and advance our mission to support environmental health professionals across Ohio.



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Recognizing the Importance of Mental Health Among Public Health Workers

Stephan Ruckman, RS, MPH
OEHA Public Affairs Chair

Abstract

There is much discussion on the importance of recognizing mental health among public health workers as we are now several years past the initial phases of Covid response in the United States. This topic, although relatively new on the minds of many, is one that has permeated our history. Public health workers have endured a multitude of large scale events the past couple decades. Further, the daily stressors that present themselves likely have impacts on an individual's mental health. This article will take a brief look at the background and future of addressing mental health among public health workers including some recognized strategies to identify and improve outcomes for those affected. The purpose of this examination is to allow the reader to become educated on the current status of what can be a relatively ignored topic and share information that may be beneficial to frontline workers and leaders alike.

Background

An examination of two studies in 2021 revealed that almost a quarter of public health workers showed at least three symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress which was 5% higher than that reported among the general population.¹ Much of this reportedly resulted from increased enforcement of quarantine and closure protocols as well as contact tracing and investigation. As significant as the number indicates this was not the first time recently public health staff were thrust into the spotlight related to a major disease outbreak. Just over a decade prior many were on the frontlines of H1N1 in 2009. In fact, the Disaster Mental Health Subcommittee of Health and Human

Services that was established at the time recommended that strategies be developed to address the need for calm at flu clinic sites, primary care settings, and emergency room locations to reduce client and worker stress.² It was noted, those that work in these environments are often exposed to increased stress, longer hours, and have the potential for negative interactions with the public.

In addition, staff that are routinely tasked with enforcing public health laws can be exposed to potentially stressful situations. The primary workforce that this effects in Ohio are Registered Environmental Health Specialists, but certainly can impact staff throughout a local health department. While the most recent focus for many in this role is education and risk management, there is a propensity for some in the public to view them as law enforcement and adversarial. To that end, many environmental health staff are redefining their roles. In most instances educating the public in lieu of just reciting laws is essential to gaining compliance and trust. Perhaps Lawrence Gostin said this best "The very strengths of public health authorities (e.g. neutrality, expertise, and broad powers) can become liabilities if they appear politically unaccountable and aloof from the real concerns and needs of the governed."³

Continuing Risk of a Mental Health Crisis Among Public Health Workers

A survey in the Fall of 2023 reported that two times the amount of public health workers reported harassment just 5 years prior. It was further reported that almost half of them reported that they were facing burnout.⁴

Following this trend at the same time, a public health works and needs study revealed that almost half of the public health workforce intended to leave their jobs within the next five years.⁵ There was a movement to increase awareness immediately following the Covid pandemic although more is being learned as we in public health continue to focus on reducing the stigma behind mental health. Much is being discovered about lasting impacts to staff and how they approach their roles today. With that in mind it is imperative that we all take a close look at some strategies to identify stressors and reduce stress going forward.

Understanding the Stressors and Fostering Open Discussion

The first step toward creating a safe and healthy workspace related to mental health issues is to allow for open dialogue. We often hear “It’s ok to not be ok”, but we don’t often discuss the action steps behind that statement. A good approach is to first recognize that our work lives are only a portion of who we are. We spend most of our lives outside of work and need to understand that what happens outside of work can and likely will have an impact on how we function in our roles as public health professionals. While this article will not provide an in depth examination of these issues, some that may have relative impact include, but are not limited to death in an employee’s family, divorce or relationship issues, and the stresses of being a primary caregiver to a child.⁶ This does not mean that an employer or coworker should ask intrusive questions about an employee’s personal life. Rather, it is just important to recognize shifts in behavior, changes in performance, and differences in attitude that may not easily be explained by something occurring as part of an employee’s job. At some point it may be necessary to engage the employee about performance concerns and discuss employee assistance or other programs if applicable. A strong human

resources officer can assist in this.

Another layer to generating a secure work environment is to understand work stressors that occur from individual roles in a department. The diversity of positions and tasks among public health workers rivals most, if not all work places. There is a unique blend of enforcement, public health education, clinical service delivery, and administration that make it sometimes difficult to fully understand each other’s role on a given day. Many Registered Environmental Health Specialists are asked to be health educators, risk assessors, and public health law enforcers. Nurses and dietitians are asked to provide individual and community clinical services. Health Educators act as an interface on methods and strategies to effectively delivery public health messages. And, public health administrators must balance it all and provide valuable leadership in the wake of daily uncertainty. All of this becomes a wonderful blend of skill sets and also a challenge of understanding. So how do we learn more about what each of us do on a daily basis? Ask. Simply ask questions and use internal communication to discuss a “day in the life” of various employees. The absence of assumption can be powerful. Once we fully understand what each other faces each day we can adequately support one another.

Strategies To Maintain a Healthy Workplace

The American Psychological Association recommends the following strategies for leaders to manage stress when responding to a crisis:

- Identify signs and symptoms of stress
- Do not respond publicly to issues until you’ve had time to pause and digest information
- Prioritize self-care

- Sleep
- Build time into your day for breaks
- Develop trusted relationships with colleagues for the purpose of support
- Celebrate wins no matter the size⁷

This list could certainly be used to address everyday stressors as well. With this in mind, we can develop messaging, workplace practices, and strategies to encourage better employee mental wellness. At a minimum it could be helpful to start a conversation surrounding these simple priority areas. To that end, it is important that a genuine effort is made at all levels. Generalized support is critical to positive outcomes and positive work environments.

Final Wellness Tips

Local public health professionals tend to compartmentalize. In other words, they establish silos within their disciplines. While it is important to have strength among specialty areas, this can be counterproductive to a full team approach and supporting one another. Successful departments often approach this issue by providing ample opportunities for staff interaction. This includes, but is not limited to education or service days, routine staff in-service training, fitness centers, or even providing other spaces such as wellness

gardens where employees can work together. As we learn more about mental health among public health workers it is likely that these simple tips may be a blueprint to improving outcomes and establishing a safe environment for all.

Author's Note

In thirty years as a public health professional, I've witnessed and endured the best and the worst of public interaction as we try to educate, promote, and provide sound public health intervention strategies. The reality is that we do not operate in a vacuum and there are many outliers that contribute to the temper of an encounter on a given day. What is important is that we develop and rely on a strong support system within our departments, among our professional associations, and at the most basic personal level with our colleagues to not only address stressors, but celebrate even the smallest of successes. Our communities and those we serve will certainly benefit. And, we will be much healthier because of it. It is my intent to expand upon this topic by providing presentations and discussions at Ohio Environmental Health Association Education Conferences and would welcome any input from membership that they would deem helpful.

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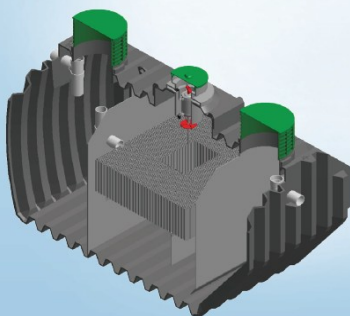
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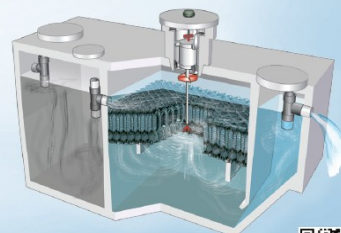
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Featured District Director's Message: Northeast

Emily Speck, BSPH, REHS
Portage County Health District

Hello! I'm Emily Speck, the Northeast District Director. A little bit about my background, I am a Kent State University 2017 graduate, with a Bachelor of Science in Public Health with a concentration in Environmental Health. I LOVED the program! It was everything I was passionate about in one major.



I began my career working for Lorain County Public Health as a Stormwater intern. My day-to-day tasks included sampling the Lake Erie beaches to be tested for e.coli and to monitor Wisconsin Sand Mounds installed around the county. I helped with the mosquito surveillance program, and shadowed the inspectors. Also, worked at Kent State University Risk Assessment and Compliance Office as an intern reviewing injury reports, creating safety flyers, and shadowed the compliance officers in the university labs. It was a great experience to see both sides of environmental health -health and safety- through those internships. Ultimately, I became a Sanitarian-In-Training (SIT) with Portage County Health District in 2017 working in many different Environmental Health Programs.

In April 2024, I became the GIS Coordinator at Portage County Health District. My position as the GIS Coordinator allowed me to bring my two passions together; environmental health and mapping. It is AMAZING the data we are collecting in environmental health, and the ways we utilize and analyze the data using

Geographic Information System (GIS). It is showing the importance of what we do in environmental health as EHST/REHS.



To finish, I just want to also say I am grateful to be your Northeast Director this year. It has been wonderful being on the planning committee. Our committee members, who come from diverse backgrounds, represent many environmental health programs. They are active professionals from different agencies, and those who are happily retired but still retain their passion for environmental health. The committee is working diligently to line up speakers with unique topics, some you may have never even heard about!

If you are interested in being on an OEHA committee or the planning committee, please reach out to me or find me at the Fall Conference, which will be held at the Twinsburg Hilton Garden Inn, on October 14th and 15th. See you there!



Environmental Health Highlights

Elizabeth Kirby, MPH, REHS
Columbus Public Health

On May 14, 2025 Environmental Health (EH) staff participated in a pool skills day at The Ohio State University's McCorkle Aquatic Pavilion.

EH had 44 staff members rotate through 5 training stations instructed by experienced Environmental Health Specialists. Attendees came to learn and share best



practices for safety and compliance including classroom portion, pump room and Equipment Replacement Notification form review, drain cover information and inspection, interactive water chemistry testing, and general pool deck protocols.

The trainings were prepared and planned by EH's internal education and training program and utilized for continuing education to maintain professional credentials.

Training skills day is a time for EH staff to learn together and increase consistency of completing inspections and operations for our licensed clients. EH believes group training allows for team building and comradery.



Participants filled out evaluation surveys for management to gauge needs for improvement and ideas for future skills days.

Columbus Public Health is grateful for our partnership with our operators at The Ohio State University Aquatic Center and thank them for the use of the facility and collaboration for a successful training day.





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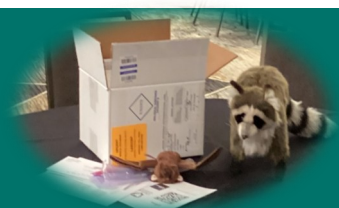
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Annual Education Conference (AEC) 2025 Recap



What a conference! The 2025 Annual Education Conference (AEC) was a remarkable success and, by all accounts, the most highly attended AEC in our organization's history. The energy, engagement, and enthusiasm from attendees made it a truly memorable event.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Emily Tyler for her outstanding leadership and behind-the-scenes work, particularly in securing a larger venue for 2026 to accommodate our growing

membership and continued momentum.

Congratulations to Alyssa Sutto, who now fills the Vice President role and to Zoe Tyler, our Vice President-Elect! We're excited about the future of OEHA under their leadership.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to making this year's conference such a success. We look forward to AEC 2026 at the Nationwide Hotel and Conference Center!





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Open Positions (With an opening of 06/20/25. For current listing [click here](#))

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Pickaway County Public Health
- **Public Health Nurse Manager**
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- **Environmental Health Specialist 2**
Ohio Department of Health
- **Account Clerk**
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- **Communicable Disease Investigator**
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- **REHS/EHST**
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- **Compliance Officer**
Snap Gourmet Foods

- **REHS/EHST**
Union County Health Department
- **Environmental Health Technician**
Union County Health Department
- **Emergency Preparedness Coordinator**
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- **Fiscal Assistant**
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- **REHS/EHST**
East Liverpool City Health District
- **Home Visitor**
Ross County Health District
- **Vector Control Technician**
Greene County Public Health
- **EH Summer Intern**
Butler County General Health District
- **Environmental Health Director**
Preble County Public Health

Educational Opportunities

- **New Employee Training** - July 8, 2025;
Delaware, Ohio
- **Southeast OEHA Conference** - September 18-19, 2025; Glouster, Ohio
- **2025 AOHC Fall Conference** - September 22-24, 2025; Dublin, Ohio
- **Southwest OEHA Conference** - October 1-2, 2025; Dayton, Ohio.
- **Northwest OEHA Conference** - October 10-11, 2025; Sandusky, Ohio
- **Northeast OEHA Conference** - October 14-15, 2025; Twinsburg, Ohio
- **Finance for Health Departments** - October 15, 2025; Dublin, Ohio
- **LEHDS** - October 15-16, 2025; Dublin, Ohio
- **New Employee Training** - November 6, 2025; Delaware, Ohio

OEHA Committees & Chairs

Body Art

Sarah Badenhop, REHS
Columbus Public Health

Campground

Mark Janowich, REHS
Erie County Health Department

Food

Scott Whittaker, REHS
Columbus Public Health

Lead

Greg Putka, REHS
Lorain County Public Health

Private Water Systems

MaryBeth Brown
Delaware Public Health District

Sewage

Eric Cherry, REHS
Huron County Public Health

Solid Waste

Chuck De Jonckheere, REHS
Hamilton County Public Health

Swimming Pool, Spa, and Special Use Pool

Thomas Fink, REHS
Cuyahoga County Board of Health

Vector Control

Zach Holbert-Watson, REHS
Franklin County Public Health

Archives

Melissa Adams, REHS
Delaware Public Health District

Constitution & By-laws

Ken Sharkey, REHS, MPH
Cleveland Department of Public Health

Exhibits

Shannon Self, REHS
Delaware Public Health District

Professional Development

Luke Jacobs, MPH, REHS
Columbus Public Health

Resolutions

Jennifer Wentzel, MPH, REHS
Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County

Website

Garrett Guillozet, MPA, REHS, AEMT
Delaware Public Health District

Auditing

Jennifer Wentzel, MPH, REHS
Public Health - Dayton & Montgomery County

Awards & Recognition

Gus Dria, REHS
Canton City Health Department

George Eagle Scholarship

Traven A. Wood, MS, REHS
Licking County Health Department

Membership

Luke Jacobs, MPH, REHS
Columbus Public Health

Public Affairs

Stephan Ruckman, MPH, REHS
Worthington Schools

Publications

Adam R. Howard, MPH, REHS
Delaware Public Health District

Concentrated Animal Feed Facility

Jason Menchhofer, MPH, REHS
Mercer County Health District

Ohio Public Health Advisory Board

Colton Masters, MPH, REHS
Mahoning County Public Health

Ohio Public Health Partnership

Chad Brown, MPH, REHS
Licking County Health Department

Sewage Treatment System Technical Advisory Committee

Eric Cherry, REHS
Huron County Public Health

OJEH

Ohio Environmental Health Association
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Columbus, OH 43215