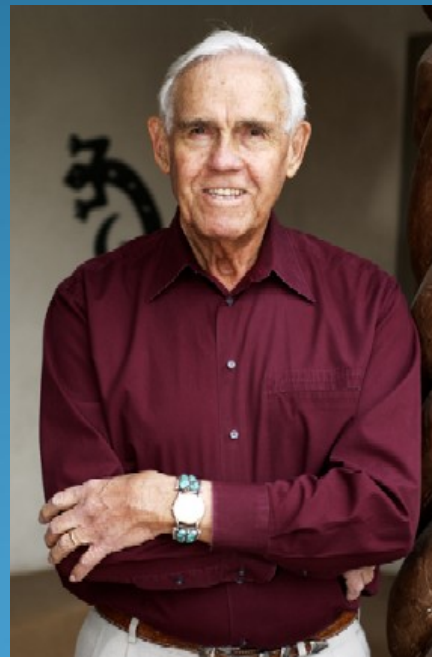


# **A VISIT WITH A SANITARIAN**

**A Seminar for Environmental Health Services Branch  
CDC / NCEH**



**Larry J. Gordon, M.S., M.P.H., D.H.L., D.E.A.A.S.  
Sanitarian  
March 31, 2009**

# THE ART OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

*Environmental Health is an Art as well as a Science*

“Environmental health and protection 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**

# THE ART OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

*Environmental Health is an Art as well as a Science*

The art of environmental health and protection includes those measures necessary to apply the science of environmental health, including, but not limited to:

- Developing Policy
- Planning
- Regulating
- Organizing
- Leading
- Prioritizing
- Marketing
- Mentoring
- Managing
- Designing Programs
- Implementing Programs
- Evaluating Programs
- Ensuring Consistent Public Information

# RELATIONSHIPS

*Ability to cause change is based on relationships*

- Relationships with numerous mentors, associates, political leaders, media representatives and protégés is essential.
- Associate with people who have ***Vision***
  - Walter Snyder
  - Walt Purdom
  - Dick Clapp
  - Emil Chanlett
  - Walter Mangold
  - Harry Bliss
  - Charlie Senn

All had commenced their careers in entrance grade roles, mostly as Sanitarians. Experience as a Sanitarian is an excellent route to pursue a variety of other managerial and policy roles in the broad and complex field of environmental health and protection, public health, government and the private sector.

# **PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE LEADERSHIP**

*Preponderance of environmental health and protection practitioners are increasingly practitioners other than environmental health and protection professionals*

## **THE WORKFORCE:**

### **WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US**

*“It is no longer a question of whether our environment will be managed, but rather how and by whom. The by whom is at least as important as the how, since the priorities and methodologies of the how are largely determined by the nature and quality of the environmental health workforce.”*

**American Journal of Public Health, 1990**

# Recognition

**Environmental health and protection services are dependent on public and political support, and practitioners must consistently communicate with the public, media and political leaders to ensure understanding and support.**

# Recognition

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**
- **Practitioners lacking necessary competency in their field of practice**
- **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.**

# PROFESSIONALISM

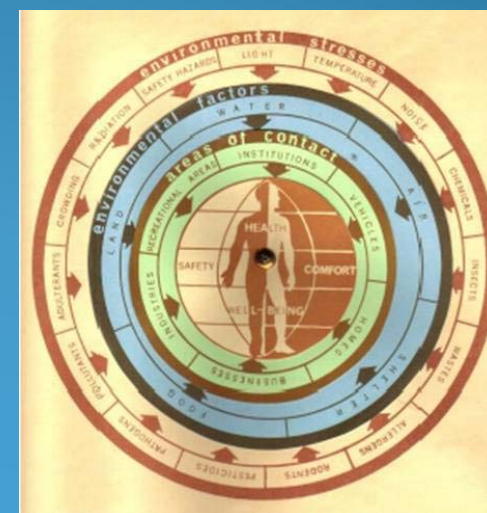
*This multi-disciplinary and multi-professional nature of the environmental health and protection workforce is a distinct strength and should be emphasized.*

- Road to professionalism is based on achievement and resultant recognition.
- Worrying about titles and registration is of little concern to the public and political leaders.
- Achievement is the prerequisite.

# EMBRACING ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND PROTECTION

*Environmental health and protection practitioners should embrace the comprehensive field of practice.*

- Most environmental health and protection professionals do not visualize or achieve their potential due primarily to inadequate competency in the art of environmental health and protection.
- Environmental health and protection practitioners have failed to grasp and market the comprehensive benefits of environmental health and protection.
- Advocacy for environmental health and protection is practiced by a diverse assortment of citizen groups, private sector groups, and official agencies.



Larry Gordon about 1968

# **ADVOCACY AND THE ART OF POLITICS**

- **Advocacy for environmental health and protection is practiced by a diverse assortment of citizen groups, private sector groups, and official agencies.**
- **Policy is developed at all levels of the public and private sectors, but the most important policy issues are the responsibility of elected officials.**
- **Many groups engage in such ineffective actions as monitoring, supporting, endorsing, watching, following, etc., rather than defining problems and solutions, marketing, lobbying, testifying, developing legislation, and gaining policy enactment.**
- **Some such groups serve as cul-de-sacs for enthusiasm, action, vision, ideas, and fiscal support.**

# LEADING CHANGE, OR BEING LEFT BEHIND

*Environmental health professionals can lead, rather than abdicating responsibility for untended issues for others to claim.*

- EPA - 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.*”
- 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.

# **BENEFITS OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

*In the sanitation era, disease prevention was considered the primary benefit. Now, the benefits of environmental health and protection not only include reduced disease and disability, but also:*

- **Enhanced economic status**
- **Enhanced productivity**
- **Enhanced educational achievement**
- **Fewer social problems**
- **A more livable environment**
- **A better quality of life, and**
- **Reduced health care costs**

# AN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH VISION

*A Vision Produced By Imagination...*

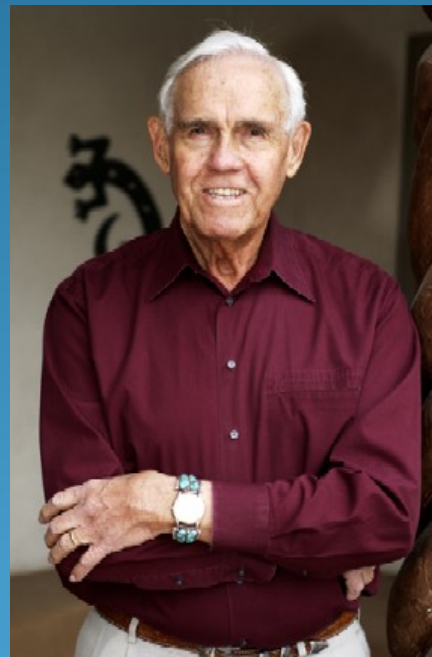
*We Should Envision Communities in which:*

- Environmental health problems are **measured and defined** prior to designing and implementing control measures?
- Environmental health efforts are based on **sound risk assessment and epidemiology**?
- Environmental health practitioners possess the **broad array of competencies** necessary to lead in addressing community environmental health problems?
- Broad environmental **health communication bridges are constantly traveled** by the public, the media, and policy makers?
- Public policy leaders **seek the input** of environmental health practitioners prior to developing policy impacting environmental health?

Excerpt from keynote talk by Larry Gordon, ASPH, 2001

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