

**HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND PROTECTION IN
ALBUQUERQUE AND NEW MEXICO: AN OVERVIEW**

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While I have enjoyed developing this presentation at the request of Sarah Kotchian, Director, Albuquerque Environmental Health Department, I should note that I have a greater interest in the future than the past of environmental health and protection. For my thoughts and recommendations regarding the future of environmental health and protection, I refer you to the "Report of the Committee on the Future of Environmental Health" which was recently published in two issues (Volume 55, Numbers 4 and 5) of the Journal of Environmental Health. I was privileged to develop most of this report which is now being widely referenced and utilized throughout our nation.

For more thorough coverage regarding the history of environmental health and protection in New Mexico than I have been allotted time for today, I commend to you three more thorough sources of information. The first source is the book titled A History of Public Health in New Mexico, by Myrtle Greenfield, who had served as Director of the New Mexico Public Health Laboratory since its creation by the New Mexico Board of Public Health in 1919. Her book details happenings through 1955. Miss Greenfield, one of my many mentors, was also a member of the Albuquerque Health Department Advisory Board (now the Joint Air Quality Control Board and the Metropolitan Environmental Health Advisory Board) which I created by Executive Order in the mid 1950's. The second source is the voluminous clippings contained in the albums of the

Albuquerque Environmental Health Department provide details of the activities of the Albuquerque Health Department and the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department from the mid 1950's through the early 1970's. These clippings provide an education in environmental health practice for those wishing to pursue a career in environmental health and protection. Another source is my manuscript, Environmental Protection Adventures, which covers the years 1950 through 1992 complete with my biases and opinions regarding many of the occurrences during those years. Sarah Kotchian may have distributed some relevant pages of the pre-publication document to you prior to this discussion.

For the portion of this presentation that occurred after 1950, I make no apologies for telling the history of environmental health as I experienced it. If this period of environmental health history is of interest to you, it is covered in a much more comprehensive and orderly fashion in my book Environmental Protection Adventures.

Perhaps recollections of the past may even be valuable as well as informative for it has been said that, "He who ignores history is destined to repeat it." And some other sage noted that, "History provides no excuse but does provide some understanding."

A New Mexico Public Health Association, a forerunner to the New Mexico Lung Association, was first established in New Mexico in 1917 and provided a great deal of the ideas, energy and enthusiasm necessary to develop the New Mexico Department of Public Health in 1919. In 1916, Dr. Charles Chapin wrote that, "It is unfortunate that a state with a population which now numbers nearly half a million should do nothing for public health. It is the only state of which this can be said." Some forty years later, another eminent public health authority and author, Dr. Wilson Smillie, wrote that, "The last state to form

a Board of Health was New Mexico. It began late, but within a short time it had one of the best state health departments in the nation. "

But returning to 1919, the establishment of the New Mexico State Health Department was truly the result of the efforts of the people of New Mexico. Slightly before the state health department was formed by the 1919 New Mexico Legislature, the National Rural Health Act magnanimously authorized "up to \$10,000" from federal funds. While such money was badly needed, the state could not accept the federal grant as it had no public health machinery and because there were no state matching funds.

There had been a pre-existing State Board of Health and Medical Examiners which served largely to regulate the practice of medicine. In 1918, Governor Lindsey placed \$3,500 from his contingency fund for the board "to prosecute keepers of immoral houses and to stamp out vice in the state." It would appear that such a shot in the arm in still needed!

Clinton P. Anderson (later to become U.S. Representative, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, and U.S. Senator) was one of the leaders of the New Mexico Public Health Association and became its first director in 1919. Anderson had come to work for the old Albuquerque Herald (since merged into the Albuquerque Journal) in 1918 after having come to New Mexico to recover from tuberculosis. Among many other remembrances, Anderson described powerful Senator George Kaseman as a "stumbling block. " Kaseman criticized the health department's "lavish spending" and the purchase of a portable chlorination plant. Kaseman took particular exception to the portable chlorination plant, having indicated that things of that nature should not be purchased until needed. By one of the strange workings of fate, the next outbreak of typhoid fever

was in Madrid in the mining camp of Senator Kaseman. After the chlorination had accomplished its good things, Senator Kaseman was most penitent, never wanted the chlorination plant to leave Madrid, purchased the plant, and he and his wife became powerful friends of public health and health care, as evidenced by the Anna Kaseman Memorial Hospital.

Newspapers were not particularly supportive of early efforts to develop a state health department. One editor suggested that a state health commissioner would be enough, another suggested that since a public health nurse would be essential, only a nurse would be needed. And another believed that since the commissioner of health would have knowledge of sanitation, there would be no need for a sanitary engineer. Others believed that the \$2,000 salary for a bacteriologist and the cost of a laboratory could be saved as there was a bacteriologist in Albuquerque who could provide all the bacteriological examinations necessary for no more than \$250 per year.

The second meeting of the Board of Health in August, 1919 saw the authorization of the Division of Sanitary Engineering, which was the direct line precursor to the New Mexico Environment Department. At the fourth meeting of the New Mexico Board of Health in January, 1920, the Public Health Laboratory was authorized, Myrtle Greenfield was appointed director, and a small laboratory established on the University of New Mexico campus. At this 1920 meeting, regulations were adopted governing water supply, sewage disposal, sanitation of foods, and the prohibition of common drinking cups and towels in public places.

During those days milk supplies were abominable, filthy and infected with tuberculosis, brucellosis, and mastitis. Milk was not pasteurized. Water supplies were

dangerous and the cause of typhoid and dysentery, and there was no chlorination of filtration. Sewage disposal was a tremendous problem as it was untreated, discharged into stream, and used for irrigating vegetables. Three-fourths of the population used outdoor privies of which 10% were fly-proof. Malaria was common in many areas of New Mexico. Garbage was strewn around homes, alleys, and in open spaces as there was no organized collection. House flies were everywhere, breeding in garbage, sewage, and horse manure. Food sanitation was non-existent, and there was no organized program. In 1940, there were 125 cases of rabies among dogs.

In 1949, the regional office of the U.S. Public Health Service issued a report stating that the death rate for diarrhea and enteritis was nearly seven times as high in New Mexico as in the United States as a whole, and that death rates from typhoid and paratyphoid fever were twice the national average. The state health director said it demonstrated "that much basic sanitation work is still needed in New Mexico because typhoid fever, diarrhea and enteritis are known among public health workers as the filth diseases. They are spread through the improper disposal of the intestinal discharges, which indicates that one of the pressing problems before New Mexico is better sewage disposal, better and safer water supplies, more protection of food supplies, and an unrelenting fight against flies and other insects which play a role in the spread of filth. If these death rates are to be reduced, not only must the number of sanitarians be increased, but the municipalities must develop more comprehensive systems of water supplies and sewage disposal plants."

But the early day sanitary engineers and sanitarians quickly made giant strides in making inroads on all such sanitation and sanitary engineering problems. Medical health officers and sanitary engineers reigned supreme, and sanitarians were utilized provided

they stayed with their roles of inspection, sampling and surveillance. Another of my early day mentors, Carl Henderson, told me that early day sanitarians were also used to paint the health offices, cut off dog heads to ship for rabies examinations, and chauffeur the health officers.

The New Mexico District Health Act of 1935 created ten health districts. Every district had at least one health officer, one public health nurse and one sanitarian. The state did have full time, albeit sparse, coverage.

I was appointed Grant County Sanitarian in 1950, with a salary of \$225.00 per month and \$6.00 per diem when I was away overnight. The medical health officer, Dr. John C. Mitchell, was among the best, and he was also a great mentor for me. I subsequently became district sanitarian for three counties, and within a year was promoted to the central office in Santa Fe as state sanitarian with duties of insuring implementation of the recently enacted state food acts, training field sanitarians, performing quality control functions, writing and editing the New Mexico Sanitation Newsletter, and handling other special assignments throughout the state. My supervisors were still sanitary engineers and medical health officers.

Following World War II, New Mexico had begun experiencing other problems as the result of population growth and the advent of various chemical pollutants. These enlarged and compounded the nature and scope of environmental health significantly, and the term "environmental health" became vogue, rather than "sanitary engineering." In the early 1950's, the title of the Sanitary Engineering and Sanitation Division was changed to Environmental Sanitation Services. State Health Officer Dr.

Ed Wicks told me that, "Physicians just can't put a handle on this thing called the environment. "

In 1955, I was appointed Chief Sanitarian for the Albuquerque Health Department. That role provided significant, but difficult and controversial opportunities. Mayor Clyde Tingley had appointed one city milk inspector in the early 1940s, ostensibly to do a better job of inspecting the dairy farms and milk plants in the Albuquerque area. Other functions such as food sanitation and meat inspection were added. By 1950, the title of the department had been changed from City Milk Inspector, through City Sanitary Inspector, and later changed from City Sanitation Department to the Albuquerque Health Department.

In 1955, I was the only person in the department who had a degree of any type. Most were political appointees whose duties largely included getting out the vote for the group in power. Inspection fees were collected in the field, and never got to the City Treasurer's office. So-called sanitarians would recommend lindane vaporizers (later outlawed) during the day, only to return after hours and sell such vaporizers to the proprietors. Bribes were commonplace. The director spent most of the day operating his laundry business and collecting money from his string of toy horses located in the front of businesses which the department regulated. He also spent considerable time on his church activities. Following their morning coffee "conferences" at the old Hilton Hotel Coffee Shop, most personnel would return to their own business interests unless it was time to collect some more inspections fees or recommend some more vaporizers. All personnel drove their private vehicles on a mileage reimbursement basis, plus gasoline from the city pumps. Mileage checks received usually approximated their monthly car payments, and

gasoline was frequently drained from their tanks out on the mesa to make it appear that they were using more gasoline so they could collect more mileage. Lines at the city gas pumps were long on Friday afternoons as employees had their vehicle tanks filled for weekend recreational trips. I recommended to the director that we at least require all personnel to check back in at the end of the day as a first step. He indicated that he didn't want them to have to do anything he didn't want to do. It was professionally and ethically lonely!

While I found it distasteful, it took me some time to get the director removed. I was then appointed Director of the Albuquerque Health Department. As rapidly as possible, I was able to remove the incompetents and commenced appointing qualified personnel such as Peter Griego, Tom Baca, Russ Rhoades, John Cordova, Richard Brusuelas, Cubia Clayton, Pat Kneafsey, Bob Gantenbein and many others. We developed other programs such as industrial hygiene, swimming pool safety and sanitation, housing conservation and rehabilitation, environmental health planning, sewage disposal, water supplies, subdivision control, air pollution control, radiation protection, and low-rent leased housing. We spawned the city urban renewal program. The animal control division was transferred to the health department, as was the entire refuse department. We improved training, accountability, and quality. We gained enactment of the New Mexico Municipal Health Act which provided the powers and duties of a municipal health department. We received the strong support of the media, the public, and elected officials. We gained approval to change the name of the department to the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Environmental Health Department (the first local environmental health department in the nation) concurrent with passage of a county environmental health code which we developed, and city-county-state

approval to extend programs throughout the county. We regulated all dairies, milk plants and food processing plants within New Mexico which shipped their products into Albuquerque. We were chiefly responsible for the action of the City Commission which annexed the entire valley area from Isleta Pueblo to Sandia Pueblo in order to provide essential services such as municipal water and sewage. (This was later overturned in district court, but it had been a hell of a fine effort!) We were primarily responsible for passage of the New Mexico Air Pollution Control Act.

And we received national recognition and numerous national awards.

It was a great time to be involved in environmental health!

In 1967 I returned to Santa Fe as Director of the newly titled Environmental Services Division. We developed the state's first air and water standards as provided in the then recently enacted state air and water acts. We improved staffing, procedures, quality control and training in the state organization. We developed the state occupational health and safety program and gained passage of the OSHA bill. Working with Governor Bruce King and Representative Jamie Koch, we gained enactment of our bill to create the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency in 1971, which in 1976 became the Environmental Improvement Division and is now the Environment Department. Creation of the EIA provided additional funding and new program authorizations.

In 1973, I was able to get the legislature to create what I termed the New Mexico Scientific Laboratory System ---- which is still a first in the nation. I was appointed SLS Director to get the SLS organized, constructed and adequately funded. In 1975, I returned to the Santa Fe office as state health officer (Administrator for Health and

Environmental Programs), again having supervision over the Environmental Improvement Division. We developed a number of new and progressive environmental initiatives including ground water protection regulations. During this time, I worked with representatives of Governor Jerry Apodaca's office to prepare legislation which created the Health and Environment Department in 1976. I was appointed deputy secretary in 1977.

Perhaps I had a crystal ball and could foretell the political, morale, personnel and programmatic problems that Governor Toney Anaya was to cause the Health and Environment Department and the Environmental Improvement Division thereof even before he was elected in 1982 when I was fortunate to return as Director of the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department in July, 1982. During Anaya's four years of political intervention, havoc and confusion, the HED provided a revolving door or eight Cabinet Secretaries, four EID Directors, three Public Health Division Directors, and so many directors of other divisions that everyone lost count. The EID and the rest of HED were in constant turmoil.

It was professionally rewarding to return to the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department. However, many key programs had been transferred or abolished. And at one point during the early 1970's, the entire department had been a grouping of divisions in the Services Department. Bernalillo County had developed its own environmental health department in 1976, leaving a few key programs as city-county operations. The appointment of Richard Brusuelas as director has finally brought professional environmental health management to the county operation.

I returned to Santa Fe in 1976 as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Environment in order to de-politicize, professionalize and stabilize the department and the Environmental Improvement Division thereof. Sarah Kotchian has continued to improve the professionalism, scope, management and community support for the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department.

Following my retirement as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Environment, the New Mexico Legislature enacted a bill changing the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Division to the New Mexico Environment Department. The measure had been requested by Governor King. As we had done in Albuquerque in the 1960's, such a measure was appropriate and inevitable due to the increasing importance and complexity of environmental health and protection issues, and the lack of programmatic relationship between environmental programs and the major health care activities of the New Mexico Health Department. The New Mexico Environment Department is a direct line successor of the New Mexico Sanitary Engineer authorized in 1919. If the past is prologue, it is certain that environmental problems, programs and organizations will continue to evolve in ways that are as yet unforeseen.