

President's Message



Looking Backward, Looking Forward

BY BARBARA DAWSON, AIHA® PRESIDENT

I'm a history enthusiast, so as I begin my term as AIHA President, I can't help but reflect on AIHA's seven decades of service to the industrial hygiene community. When I look at AIHA's achievements since our formation in 1939, I am in awe of our success. Now, on the cusp of our 75th anniversary year, we would do well to ask what our next seventy-five years might look like.

Recently, the changes we've experienced as a profession have stemmed not only from developments within industrial hygiene but from external trends such as the revolution in communications, the shifting generational preferences for consuming information, the staggering pace of change in technology, and much more. The AIHA Board recently approved a path forward that will ensure AIHA remains poised to meet these challenges and anticipate trends in a way that is sustainable into the future. This month, *The Synergist*® has given me more than the usual allotment of space to discuss how AIHA is adapting to changes in our external environment so that we can continue to be relevant and viable.

Association Business

It's clear that AIHA's success through the years has been due in large part to the hard work of thousands of our volunteers, and volunteers will remain an integral part of our professional community for many years to come. In 2008 AIHA participated in a landmark study on volunteering in which we benchmarked our own volunteers with hundreds of thousands of others across the U.S. (For more information on this study, see Beth Gazely's article "The Volunteer Experience" in the January 2009 issue of *The Synergist*.) And what we found is that we have some of the very best, most dedicated volunteers in the world. This was no surprise to us, and the dedication of our volunteers is certainly a strength AIHA can rely on as we contend with developments outside of our association that will nevertheless have profound ramifications for us and all membership organizations.

Six Recommendations

The task for AIHA's Board of Directors is to figure out a way for AIHA to continue to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape while anticipating the future needs of our association and its members. After careful consideration, we approved six recommendations intended to ensure that AIHA has a sustainable stream of resources that will allow us to fulfill our mission to protect worker health. These recommendations constitute AIHA's priorities for the next few years. We are at the very beginning of this journey, and we anticipate a number of opportunities for you to have input along the way. If our past is an indicator of our future, I know that we will continue to be successful in supporting you as practitioners of industrial hygiene.

1. **Develop an organization-driven content strategy.** Content, in this sense, refers to all of the material AIHA produces either as benefits of membership or as products for occupational and environmental health and safety professionals. Guidelines, webinars, e-newsletters, books, social media, our website, this magazine—all must stem from a common set of organizational priorities. It is our goal to develop a focused, prioritized, research-based program of work to make sure our decisions on which activities to undertake and which products to develop continue to be responsive to the marketplace. At the same time, we need to become more purposeful curators of the content that our members and customers need.
2. **Convene a scientific summit of like-minded, science-based organizations.** Advancing the science of industrial hygiene is AIHA's key reason for being. While this recommendation is very much in its early stages, we envision inviting a variety of IH and EHS organizations whose missions are similar to ours to participate in the summit. The summit would provide an opportunity to explore areas

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Advancing the science of industrial hygiene is AIHA's key reason for being.

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where we could work together to make the best use of our resources to further those missions.

3. Create "personalized" premium membership benefits. The personalization of products and services is a current association best practice. To succeed in an environment where people have so many demands for their time and resources, AIHA must continue to provide value-added benefits in a more individualized manner that supports our members' current roles and future goals.
4. Create science-based content collaborations. Working together with like-minded organizations, we will explore possibilities for producing new content for our members in a collaborative way.
5. Create an improved support system for AIHA's local sections. Like AIHA national, local sections rely on volunteer contributions. Some local sections have a large population of AIHA members and/or industrial hygiene professionals. Other local sections exist in areas with few IHS and can offer strong programs only by partnering with other organizations. AIHA needs to figure out how to give both kinds of local groups the support they need.

6. Align resources to support career efforts. Industrial hygienists' professional needs change over time as they move out of entry-level positions and gain new and different

responsibilities over the course of their careers. We need to attract, support and maintain recent IH graduates who are entering the field but also support our more senior members who are continuing to work because of the economy. It is our goal to become more attuned to our members' career development needs and offer appropriate support for each stage of their careers.

The Road Ahead

Taken together, these six recommendations constitute a transformational change in the way AIHA will operate in the coming years. Achieving these goals will require innovative new approaches to identifying and developing programs, and some patience on the part of members as we work to get the balance right. We'll need input from a broad array of stakeholders, most importantly from our members, volunteer groups, and local sections.

The current business landscape is full of challenges, and the path that leads us where we need to go won't be a straight line. We're going to meander, double-back, go down some blind alleys, and maybe even reverse course. But accepting these challenges and setting out on this road is crucial if AIHA's next seventy-five years are going to be as successful as the first seventy-five. The AIHA Board of Directors and I look forward to partnering with you on this journey. 🚀

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