

▶ VOICE FROM YOUR ASSOCIATION



Kristen Ruby-Cisneros
National Environmental
Health Association

Our *Journal*: A Look Back as We Move Forward

Editor's Note: As we continue our mission to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce, the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) is excited to introduce a new column in the *Journal*. This platform provides our staff, leadership, representatives, and committees the opportunity to share their valuable insights and expertise on key issues shaping our field. Aligned with our vision of healthy environments, protected communities, and empowered professionals, this column serves as a space to engage our community and extend our influence in advancing the environmental health profession.

Through this column, we aim to further our commitment to thought leadership by delivering timely, essential content that resonates with our members and the broader environmental health community. By fostering dialogue around emerging challenges, innovative solutions, and best practices, we will continue to ensure that NEHA remains a trusted source of knowledge and a catalyst for positive change. We look forward to leveraging the voice of our association to shape the future of environmental health.

The conclusions of this column are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of NEHA.

Kristen Ruby-Cisneros is the managing editor of the *Journal of Environmental Health*. She has worked at NEHA for more than two decades and has overseen the *Journal* for the last 15 years.

The End of an Era

It felt right for me to finally step out from behind the curtain and share with you—our members and readers—the exciting developments and changes underway and on the horizon for our *Journal of Environmental Health*. This moment is also bittersweet, as change is never easy, even when it is the right path forward. So, you are probably asking: What change am I alluding to?

While there are many new developments and changes already in place or soon to be implemented, the change I am referring to is that we will no longer print the *Journal*. If you are holding a printed copy of this issue in your hands, you are holding the last printed copy of the *Journal* that the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) will offer. But do not worry, although we are ending the print version of the *Journal*, we will continue

to publish it electronically—the format that most of you use and prefer.

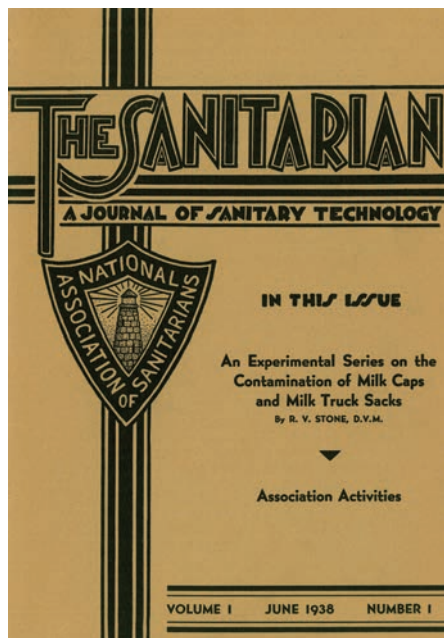
I love having printed copies of the *Journal* at my desk. I did a quick check and found that I have issues going back to 2019. And trust me, I still flip through them, whether to find past content or simply to reflect on the tangible results of my work over the years at NEHA. I love the feel of the paper in my hands, the soft shine of the pages, and the crispness of the print and imagery on each page. Flipping through an issue brings back all the memories tied to it: the challenges, the successes, the stress and long nights, the amazing authors I have met and worked with, the knowledge we were able to share with our readers, the authors' excitement and pride in publication, and the incredible team working behind the scenes to bring all the content together into a cohesive final product.

While that sense of sentimentality may not be as strong with the electronic version of the *Journal*, we also have to look to the future and to what makes the most sense for our organization and the *Journal*. Since 2015, when we stopped mailing members a printed copy of the *Journal* and began providing an electronic version, the number of issues we have printed has steadily declined—from more than 5,000 copies before 2015 to just 500 now.

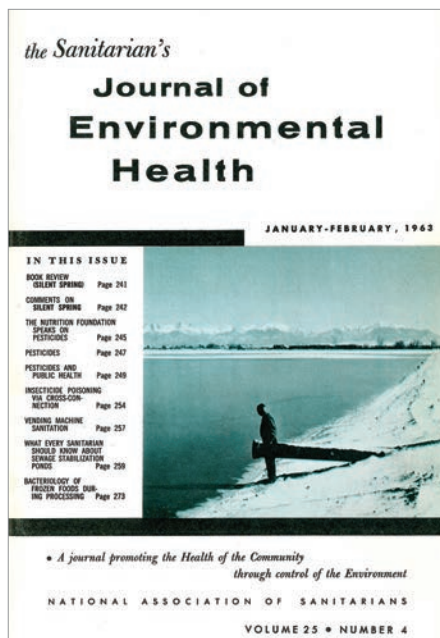
We offered members a 1-year print subscription at a reasonable price. Some of you have faithfully renewed that subscription over the past decade, but the numbers have steadily declined. Today, only 4% of our members receive a printed copy of the *Journal*, making the expense increasingly difficult to justify. Although printing fewer copies might

FIGURE 1

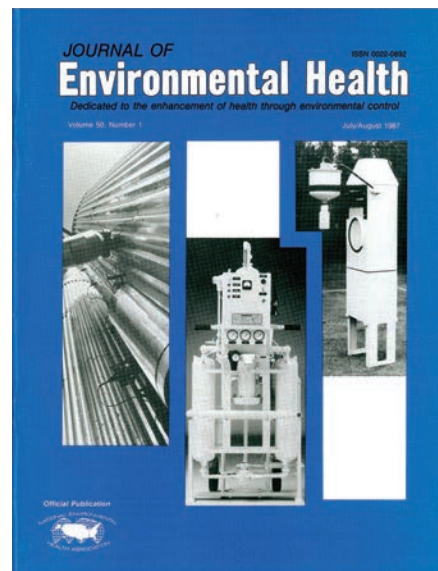
A Look at Our Covers Over the Last 88 Years



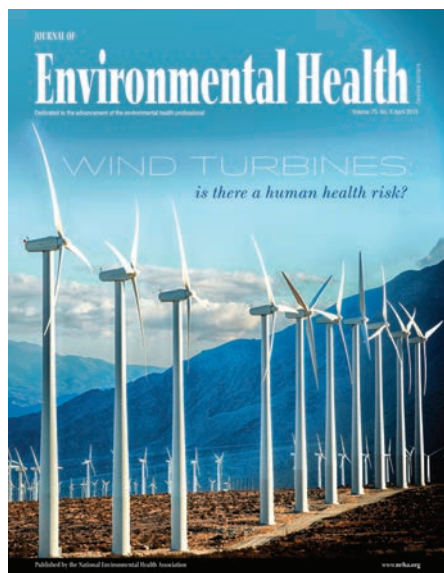
Volume 1, June 1938



Volume 25, January/February 1963



Volume 50, July/August 1987



Volume 75, April 2013



Volume 88, June 2026

*Journal of
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- Webpage: www.neha.org/jeh
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seem cost-saving, our per-copy costs have risen because the setup cost for each issue remains the same. In addition, agency and organizational subscriptions have dropped sharply over the past decade.

Our decision to stop printing the *Journal* is not unique. Many scientific and peer-reviewed journals have moved away from print publication because digital publishing is significantly more cost-effective and acces-

sible. Printing and mailing physical journals require substantial expenditures for paper, production, and distribution, while online publication allows publishers to release issues and content more quickly and at

lower cost. Researchers and publishers have increasingly favored digital dissemination because online journals provide immediate access, searchable archives, hyperlinking, multimedia integration, and broader international reach. Many journals have transitioned to online-only publication because electronic publishing reduces production costs and environmental impacts associated with print circulation (Singla et al., 2024). Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped publishing by improving speed, scalability, and audience accessibility while reducing the logistical burdens associated with physical production (Calfano, 2025).

The growth of open-access publishing has further accelerated the decline of print journals. Universities, funding agencies, and researchers increasingly expect research to be available online without subscription or membership barriers. Digital publishing platforms support this expectation by enabling immediate distribution without the logistical limitations of printed journals. In addition, open-access articles receive greater visibility and citation impact, reinforcing publishers' incentives to prioritize digital-first dissemination models (Piwowar et al., 2018). The transition to electronic access has also been supported by libraries and academic institutions, which now invest more heavily in digital databases rather than maintaining extensive print collections.

Environmental sustainability has also contributed to the decline in print journal production. Electronic publication substantially reduces paper consumption, transportation emissions, and the physical storage requirements associated with printed journals. Many publishers view online-only publication as a way to reduce both financial and environmental costs while maintaining or improving scholarly performance metrics (Singla et al., 2024). Collectively, these economic, technological, accessibility, and sustainability pressures have led many scientific publishers to conclude that digital publication better supports the evolving needs of the professions they serve.

We know this change may be disappointing for some members, and it was not a decision we made lightly. We care deeply about the *Journal* and its long history in print, but we also have a responsibility to make thoughtful, fiscally responsible decisions for the associa-

tion. Ultimately, continuing to print and mail the *Journal* was no longer sustainable.

Looking Back

So, this issue becomes part of the storied history of the *Journal*. Before we look ahead, let us look back at the legacy of our publication so far. The *Journal*, originally titled *The Sanitarian*, was first published by the National Association of Sanitarians in June 1938. The original publication measured 6 3/4 × 10 in., contained 28 pages, and offered annual subscriptions for \$2.50. Publication was monthly but shifted to a bimonthly schedule in 1943. In 1993, the publication frequency increased to 10 issues per year, a format that continues today, resulting in approximately 680 issues published over the past 88 years (Figure 1).

Over the decades, the *Journal* has been guided by numerous editors and technical editors, beginning with Walter S. Mangold in 1938. Several notable environmental health professionals later served in editorial leadership roles, helping shape the publication's direction and scholarly standards. The *Journal* also developed a rigorous peer-review process to ensure the quality and relevance of all published articles.

In 1962, *The Sanitarian* was renamed the *Journal of Environmental Health* to better reflect the evolving scope of the environmental health profession. Despite changes in format and publication frequency, the *Journal* maintained a consistent focus on publishing scientific and professional content relevant to environmental health. For 88 years, the *Journal* has published more than 3,000 scientific articles, along with numerous columns by NEHA leadership, partner organizations, federal agencies, and subject-matter experts.

The *Journal* expanded into digital publishing in 2009 by introducing online-only articles accessible to NEHA members, which were later compiled into annual print issues. In 2011, an electronic version of the *Journal* became available to members. In 2015, NEHA members began receiving the electronic version of the *Journal* as part of their membership benefits in place of the print version. In January 2024, the *Journal* became an open-access publication, and issues dating back to 2012 were posted online for all to view. And starting with the July/August 2026 issue, the *Journal* transitions to a fully electronic publication.

Moving Forward

There are many exciting things happening with the *Journal*, and even more possibilities on the horizon. I would be remiss if I did not share them with you.

- **Open Access:** As mentioned, beginning in January 2024, the *Journal* transitioned to an open-access publication model. This change allows all readers to freely access content online without a subscription, expanding the global reach and accessibility of environmental health research and professional information.
- **Refined Scope and Mission:** The *Journal* has refined its aims and scope to more clearly align with NEHA's mission of building, sustaining, and empowering an effective environmental health workforce. The *Journal* continues to emphasize scientific research, practical applications, and emerging environmental health issues relevant to practitioners and researchers.
- **New Indexing and Submission Platform on Scholastica:** The *Journal* recently updated its author submission and indexing infrastructure through the Scholastica platform, modernizing manuscript submission, peer review, editorial workflows, and metadata indexing processes. The updated system improves efficiency for authors, reviewers, and editors while increasing the discoverability of published content.
- **Spanish Version of the *Journal*:** The *Journal* has expanded accessibility by offering a Spanish-language version of recent issues (from April 2025 to the present). This initiative helps broaden engagement with environmental health professionals and readers across Spanish-speaking communities and countries.
- **Future Initiatives:** Looking ahead, we hope to expand the number of published articles through advance online publication. We are also rolling out a *Journal* podcast next month to give you another way to engage with the content in each issue. These initiatives are intended to increase knowledge sharing, improve accessibility, and engage broader audiences within the environmental public health profession. Stay tuned for more information!

Final Thoughts on a New Era

I am excited about the changes underway and what they mean for our *Journal*, our

membership, and the environmental public health profession. I hope you will continue to find the content we provide relevant and valuable to your work. I also hope you find the ways we deliver that content engaging and easy to use.

Even with 150 issues under my belt, I am still learning to be a better caretaker of our *Journal*. That said, we value your input on how we can better meet your needs through the digital pages of the *Journal*. Please reach out to us at jeh@neha.org with any suggestions or comments. We welcome your feedback! 🌸

AI Disclaimer: ChatGPT (GPT-5.5 Model) was used to assist with the literature search on digital publishing trends and the shift away from print publications and to pro-

vide an initial summary of the findings. AI was also used to summarize the *Journal's* history from a 75-year tribute the author wrote in June 2013. Furthermore, M365 Copilot (Basic) was used to provide suggestions on grammar, tone, and readability. All outputs were reviewed and verified by the author.

Corresponding Author: Kristen Ruby-Cisneros, Managing Editor, *Journal of Environmental Health*, National Environmental Health Association, 1400 South Colorado Boulevard, Suite 325, Denver, CO 80222-3658. Email: kruby@neha.org

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