

The Collection and Preservation of Historical Materials

Guidance for Our Affiliates

We are committed to preserving the history of our profession, which includes the valuable history of our affiliates. Historical materials and ephemera—photos, documents, conference brochures, etc.—can aid in telling the rich story of our affiliates. It can, however, be challenging to determine what to save, how to save it, and where to save it.

Our History Project Task Force has put together guidance and considerations to help you answer these questions.



Getting Started

A committee of interested individuals within your affiliate is needed. Ask for volunteers and strive for a balance of long-term to newer members. Consider asking your past presidents if they would be interested in helping out to lend their leadership and historical knowledge.

Once you have a committee, here are some questions to consider:

What Materials Should We Preserve?

Materials of historical significance can include hard-copy documents, electronic files, field equipment, books, conference programs, photos, videos, website content, social media, etc. Your committee should determine what is significant to the history of the affiliate. Keep in mind that present-day materials aren't historical now but they will be in the future.

Once you have determined what to preserve, consider creating categories for your historical items such as:

- Affiliate history
- Professional development
- Legislation related to environmental health (e.g., registration acts, health codes)
- Technical information

- Past and present issues
- Regional or national history

How Do We Find These Materials?

Our experience has been that it will find you! Long-time members, state and local environmental health departments and programs, and past leadership are good sources for historical materials.

How Do We Store These Materials?

Consider what you can digitize in either photos, videos, or scanned documents. Digitized materials can be stored in the cloud. Your affiliate can use either a free cloud system or budget for a paid system. Overall, the more you can digitize, the easier it is to store and catalog your items. Also, it is less expensive compared to physical storage.

If you do have physical items, a permanent location is needed. If within your affiliate's budget, you might need a storage unit. If you do have a physical storage area, keep in mind that the space needs to be dry, safe from pests, and not exposed to extreme temperatures. Be aware that a storage area for your historical materials can become a dumping ground for unrelated or insignificant materials. Your committee should be given the authority to purge these materials.

Other options for physical storage include arrangements or partnerships with a local college or university, state or local health department, museum, or library.

Lastly, if you think you have an item that is appropriate and significant for NEHA to keep and maintain, please reach out to us at support@neha.org.

Take It to the Next Level

- Develop your historical materials into a display or exhibition for state, regional, or national conferences. A display creates an interest not only in your affiliate and our profession but also in finding and preserving these items.
- Develop a catalog system of your historical materials. A catalog allows you to identify what you have and where it is stored, which can be useful if questions come up about your affiliate's past or if you need to put together a display for an upcoming conference. A catalog also enables you to determine if newly discovered materials are redundant or fill an existing gap.

Learn more about the NEHA History Project Task Force:
neha.org/history

