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A CHECK LIST FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH LEADERSHIP

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Many outstanding environmental health leaders earn continuing recognition from their peers, the public and public policy leaders. However, many other do not receive adequate recognition or visibility, particularly at the state and local levels. So lets ask ourselves a few questions.

Are those us involved in environmental health hiding our lights under a bushel?

Do we take advantage of the fact that environmental health is widely considered to be an entitlement in the United States?

Do we fully recognize the size and societal importance of our services?

Do we emphasize that environmental health and protection is the largest single component of the field of public health and approximates half of the entire field of public health in terms of expenditures and numbers of personnel?

Do we understand that the vast majority of environmental health services are delivered by agencies and institutions other than health departments?

Have we each notified the Public Health Foundation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that the current Public Health Foundation reporting system excludes some 95% of environmental health activities and expenditures in the United States?

Do we lead rather than simply respond in recommending environmental health organizational changes?

Do we compete for leadership roles in the complex spectrum of public and private agencies delivering environmental health services?

Are we effectively involved in basic environmental health prevention measures such as the planning stages of energy production, land use, transportation methodologies, facilities construction, resource utilization, and product design.?

Do we lead in designing, gaining approval, and implementing public policy that will improve the quality of environmental health, rather than assuming that someone else will do it for us?

Do we maintain continuing communication with public policy officials at all levels of government?

Do we fully cooperate with the media and let the public know of our needs, problems and accomplishments?

Do we correct misleading and erroneous media reports?

Do citizen and political leaders look to us for information rather than relying on environmental extremists?

Do we disavow individuals and organizations that manipulate science to further their political objectives?

Do we prioritize and design programs based on sound epidemiology and public health risk assessment?

Do we understand that the proper standard for environmental health is not zero risk, but net societal benefit?

Do we analyze and question existing and proposed requirements to ensure the validity of their scientific bases?

Do we lead by engaging in controversial environmental health issues where appropriate? For example, do we promote food irradiation as a sound public health measure?

Do we ensure that environmental health personnel are educated for the field of practice regardless of agency titles? Have we written the Council on Education for Public Health and insisted on relevant environmental health accreditation requirements in schools of public health?

Have we contacted the U.S. Public Health Service to insist on a balanced and comprehensive presentation of environmental health in the Year 2010 Health Objectives for the Nation, rather than accepting the narrow imbalance presented?

Do we offer our time and talents to ensure the effectiveness and success of third-party organizations in shaping environmental health policies and developing health effects standards, such as UL and its Environmental and Public Health Council?

Effective environmental health leadership is profoundly complex and controversial, and is usually the result of individual abilities and initiatives. Many of our great leaders have been dedicated individuals who achieved eminence not because they wore the right labels or belonged to the right organization, but because they had the right ideas, the right information and the right abilities at the right time. Shattuck was a publisher, Chadwick was a lawyer, Winslow was a sanitarian, and Lasker was an advertising man. The mantle of leadership falls to those who earn it.

How do we score?