

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Proposed Continuing Education requirements for Registered Environmental Health Specialists

Why should continuing education be required of Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS)?

The Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee, California Environmental Health Association, National Environmental Health Association, California Directors of Environmental Health, California Conference of Local Health Officers, Department of Public Health (CDPH), individual REHS, and the public strongly support continuing education as a means of professional development for REHS. Currently, there are no regulatory requirements or standards for continuing education programs for REHS. However, current law, as codified in Section 106705 of the California Health and Safety Code, provides for the establishment of the requirement and standards for continuing education for REHS. Specifically, Section 106705 states “The department upon recommendation of the committee, may, by regulation, establish the requirement and standards for continuing education for registered environmental health specialists. The standards shall be established in a manner to assure that a variety of forms of continuing education are available to registered environmental health specialists.”

REHS are employed by private industry, universities, federal, state and local governments. Many of these registrants are on the front lines of public health protection. The California Legislature and CDPH have recognized that “environmental health is a dynamic field that is continually evolving into new and complex areas of concern”. Continuing education will provide opportunities for REHS to maintain scientific and technological skills needed for today’s ever changing challenges in environmental health.

How many continuing education hours will be required?

The continuing education required for renewal of the applicant’s registration will be a minimum of 24 contact hours. A contact hour is equivalent to 50-60 minutes of participation in an organized learning experience. The 24 contact hours of continuing education should be successfully completed during the two years preceding the application for renewal.

Some courses are not presented in “contact hours” but in college units or Continuing Education Units (CEUs). The number of contact hours per unit can vary among colleges and training providers but generally the following conversions will apply:

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|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 50-60 minutes | = 1 contact hour |
| 0.1 continuing education unit (CEU) | = 1 contact hour |
| 1 quarter unit | = 10 contact hours |
| 1 semester unit | = 15 contact hours |

Can I be exempted from meeting the continuing education requirement?

REHS may seek exemption from the continuing education requirements for registration renewal on the grounds of serious illness or military service by applying to the Department in writing. The process of requiring written requests for exemption provides the Department with documentation of the request. The Department will review each request to determine if it qualifies for exemption from the continuing education requirement.

What is the status of the proposed continuing education requirements for REHS?

The regulations that will require continuing education for REHS in California are currently in the rulemaking process. It is anticipated that the continuing education regulations will be adopted in 2009. Following is a timeline for the implementation of continuing education (CE) requirements:

- REHS expires 12/31/2009 complete 24 hours of CE from 1/1/2010 – 12/31/2011
submit evidence of CE with 12/31/2011 biennial renewal
- REHS expires 12/31/2010 complete 24 hours of CE from 1/1/2011 – 12/31/2012
submit evidence of CE with 12/31/2012 biennial renewal

Who will approve the continuing education courses?

CDPH will approve Accreditation Agencies (AAs) who are responsible for approving and monitoring course providers. AAs will accredit and approve course providers of continuing education for the REHS. Once course providers are accredited they are Recognized Providers (RPs). RPs will provide approved training for the REHS. Several organizations have expressed interest in becoming an AA including the California Environmental Health Association, National Environmental Health Association (NEHA), Environmental Health Institute, California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB), California-Nevada American Waterworks Association and California State Universities.

Can I get a course approved by CDPH that has not been approved by an Accreditation Agency?

In order for CDPH to approve continuing education courses, they must be approved by an AA; however, some AAs may approve continuing education courses on a case by case basis.

What is a Recognized Provider and Accreditation Agency?

Each Recognized Provider of continuing education courses must be evaluated and approved by an AA. The AA is authorized through the CDPH-REHS program. AAs are required to meet established criteria for identifying course providers that are competent, relevant and accountable.

How can I become a continuing education Recognized Provider?

First, you will need to apply for approval by an AA. A list of AAs will be posted on the REHS website. Each approved course you teach counts towards your contact hours the first time it is presented.

What subjects may be approved for continuing education?

Food protection, solid waste management, liquid waste management, medical waste management, water supply, housing and institutions, bathing places, vector control, hazardous materials management, underground tanks, air sanitation, safety and accident prevention, land development and use, disaster sanitation, electromagnetic radiation, milk and dairy products, noise control, occupational health, rabies and animal disease control, recreational health, bioterrorism, emergency preparedness, lead poisoning, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, epidemiology and communicable diseases, public health, environmental health administration and management. While not an exclusive list it indicates topics and subject matter appropriate for REHS continuing education.

Where can I take courses?

It is anticipated that local colleges, universities, state funded training, county-based training, professional organizations and online courses will be approved through the AAs.

Will there be courses available to accommodate REHSs who live in rural areas?

It is expected that on-line training, journal reviews, or book reviews will be approved for continuing education credits. NEHA already approves these types of training courses. There are many existing approved course offerings that a registered professional can take to meet the new mandatory requirement. There are a number of providers that offer free continuing education coursework. The

CIWMB and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) offer free continuing education coursework with grants to pay for travel and other per diem costs to local health agencies. In addition, an individual with membership in NEHA is able to complete continuing education courses that are currently offered nationwide.

What kind of courses will be approved?

CDPH expects that a variety of courses will be available for REHSs through the approval process of the AA structure to meet the 24 contact hour requirement.

Who is responsible for paying the registration fees for continuing education coursework, me or my employer?

The employer may choose to pay registration fees based on a bargaining unit agreement with an employee union. However, there is no statutory or regulatory requirement for an employer to pay for registration fees for continuing education.

Does my employer have to give me release time to attend classes?

There is no statutory or regulatory requirement for an employer to grant release time to attend classes.

Can I get credit for continuing education courses that are pre-existing?

Only continuing education courses that are presented by a RP and reviewed and accredited by the AA will be counted toward your continuing education requirement.

Are existing continuing education courses required to be reviewed and approved?

Yes, all continuing education courses are required to be accredited through an AA for credit toward California registration requirements.

How can out of state REHS complete their continuing education?

National organizations have been invited to become AAs. NEHA has applied to become an AA and AWWA plans to apply.

How do I verify course completion?

At the time of your biennial renewal, you will be required to submit a form listing all of your completed courses. You must keep copies of certificates and documentation of completed courses for five (5) years as random audits will be conducted after each biennial renewal cycle.

How do I notify CDPH of course completion?

You will indicate completion of continuing education contact hours on your biennial REHS renewal form. Knowingly making a false statement on an application for renewal is grounds for revocation of registration (CHSC section 106715). Random audits will be used to determine compliance.

Do existing continuing education presenters have to be approved as Recognized Providers?

Yes, existing continuing education presenters need to apply with an AA and become a RP before their coursework will be accepted as meeting the registration requirements for continuing education.

Can I complain about a course Recognized Provider?

Yes, you can file a complaint by completing the REHS program's complaint form with a description of your concerns.

Are retired REHS required to meet the continuing education requirements?

No. If a retired REHS returns to active status they must meet the continuing education requirements, pay the biennial renewal fees and complete 24 contact hours of continuing education.