



California Department of Health Services Registered Environmental Health Specialist Program

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING CONTINUING EDUCATION, INCREASED FEES, AND THE REGISTERED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST FUND

The Governor's Budget provides the resources to establish a continuing education program for Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS). This new program element will be supported by a fee increase. The fees are proposed to increase from \$92 to \$175 for biennial registration renewal; from \$63 to \$126 for examination fees; and from \$73 to \$95 for application fees. The new fees should be in effect in the 2006/07 fiscal year.

1. *Why are REHS Program fees being increased?*

The fees are being increased to support the implementation of a continuing education requirement. The increase will also be used to preserve existing program activities. The current revenues are inadequate to meet program expenses. The Registration Program has not raised fees since 1990 and that has resulted in chronic revenue problems. Therefore, fees must be increased to bring revenues in line with anticipated program expenditures. This is an opportunity to stabilize the program revenue.

2. *Why weren't the fees increased gradually over the last 10-15 years to meet program costs?*

The Registration Program has requested fee increases in prior budget years, but those requests have been unsuccessful. It is important to recognize that many priorities drive the budget and legislative process and this increase in fees and budget authority may be the only opportunity for many years.

3. *How are the new fees going to be used?*

The increase will fund the administration of a continuing education program including database tracking of continuing education units, developing accepted procedures for auditing continuing education providers and courses, developing web based provider and course information, and developing a mechanism to evaluate complaints against providers. In successive years the increased revenues will be used to cover existing program expenses that are currently under-funded.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING CONTINUING EDUCATION,
INCREASED FEES, AND THE REGISTERED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
SPECIALIST FUND
PAGE 2**

4. *How much additional money will be raised by the increase?*

The proposed increase is expected to generate \$130,000 a year.

5. *Why can't the increase be implemented gradually?*

A gradual step increase over several years will not bring in the revenue needed to implement continuing education, which is the main reason for the increase. This would likely result in the proposal being denied.

6. *Can I pay early to avoid the higher fee?*

No. You will be required to pay the renewal fee in effect at the time your license expires. Advanced payments would defeat the purpose of the fee increase by limiting the revenues.

7. *Why is the fee structured to be most heavily weighted on the REHS instead of the applicants and the examinees?*

All fees were reviewed and increased based on program needs. The exam fees were moderately increased to cover the cost of administering and validating the exam. The applicant fee was minimally increased to reduce the possible impact on new REHS. A higher increase on applicants could impact recruitment of new REHS. The biennial fees were increased to pay the costs of establishing and maintaining a continuing education program. The increase in biennial fees will also support ongoing program costs. The proposed fee increases will help to enhance the profession by implementing a continuing education requirement, maintaining a valid exam based on core competencies, and providing adequate resources to administer disciplinary actions for acts of professional incompetence, deceit or unethical practice.

8. *What if the fee increase does not go into effect?*

The program cannot continue to operate while running a deficit. At a staffing level of 1.5 full time equivalents there is no fat to trim. Without the fee increase certain program activities will have to be reduced or eliminated. This would significantly cripple the Registration Program and make it extremely difficult to maintain a viable program.

9. *What is the status of the REHS fund, how much money is in the fund?*

The REHS fund is a "special fund" created by Chapter 1271/83, which also required the Department of Health Services to establish the qualifications for REHS. The application, examination and license renewal fees are deposited into

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING CONTINUING EDUCATION, INCREASED FEES, AND THE REGISTERED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST FUND

PAGE 3

the fund and can only be used for REHS program activities. Since it is a “special fund” with statutory protections, only the Legislature can appropriate the money using the provisions of the Budget Act. The state requires the REHS program and all special fund programs to maintain a reserve for economic uncertainties. Currently, there is approximately \$500,000 in the reserve.

10. What does program staff do now?

License REHS: Maintain a registry of California REHSs, invoice and collect fees, and distribute registration cards.

Approve Educational Institutions: Review curriculum, faculties and facilities of the environmental health degree programs and approved university curriculums, and review universities applying for approval.

Establish Competency Standards: Maintain a valid job analysis and registration exam, identify important knowledge and skills, refresh exam questions and test plan, and review educational requirements.

Conduct Complaint Investigations: Review and investigate complaints regarding professional incompetence, unethical practices, or acts of deceit, misrepresentation, fraud or negligence by REHS.

Enforce Disciplinary Actions: Upon recommendation of the Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee, revoke, suspend or deny the registration of a REHS who violates CHSC 106715 Grounds for Suspension; Denial, Refusal to Renew, or Revocation.

Interpretation of Registration Act: Provide registrants, applicants for registration, directors of environmental health, health officers, and other interested parties with guidance and information regarding the requirements of the statute.

This Q and A document was developed to help address questions regarding the needs of the registered environmental health specialist program and the profession. Continuing education has been identified as a key element in the development of a competent and effective environmental health professionals by the California Environmental Health Association, California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health, California Conference of Local Health Officers, academia and members of the environmental health community.

Since the Registration Act was passed in 1945 much has changed in California. Environmental Health is one of the most vital and rapidly expanding fields of public health. The duties have moved beyond that of inspector or regulator to a critical player in the protection of our citizens. The environmental health specialists of the 21st century are on the front lines of disease prevention, using modern methods and effective tools to investigate the environmental causes of disease and mortality. The September 11, 2001 attack, on our country, demonstrated the critical role that environmental health plays in the

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING CONTINUING EDUCATION,
INCREASED FEES, AND THE REGISTERED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
SPECIALIST FUND
PAGE 4**

multidisciplined response that the environmental health professional must play in protecting the health of America. Environmental health professionals are also expected to meet challenges associated natural disasters, bioterrorism, and pandemic influenzas. Continuing education will assure that the environmental health professionals are prepared to assume their rightful role in meeting the challenges of this rapidly changing field of public health and the continuing expectations of the citizens of California.

There will be costs associated with the maintenance of a viable registration program and establishment of a continuing education requirement. Failure to support this proposal will result in the demise of the profession. The future of environmental health rests with the California Environmental Health Association, California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health, California Conference of Local Health Officers, academia, and individual registered environmental health specialists. It is up to all of us to support the environmental health profession.

If you have any questions regarding the registration program, please contact Margaret Blood or Glenn Takeoka.