

Why a NAHMMA Chapter?

By David Nightingale NAHMMA Chapters Committee Chair

Where did the NAHMMA Chapters idea come from?

The North American Hazardous Materials Management Association (NAHMMA) Board of Directors has deemed this to be the year of the NAHMMA member. The NAHMMA Board has been very active in the past two years to put into place programs and benefits to the membership as well as recruiting new members. In addition, there has been serious discussion of the need for local/regional chapters of NAHMMA. Based on those expressed needs, earlier this year the Board decided to create a NAHMMA Chapters Committee to develop local/regional Chapters. NAHMMA wants to create Chapters in areas where there is a critical mass of members to strengthen and serve the organization at the grass roots level.

Why do there need to be Chapters?

The intention of forming NAHMMA Chapters is to enhance professional development and provide support for NAHMMA members. Until recently, NAHMMA has focused mostly on broadly distributed newsletters, e-mails, and the national conference. Several states and regions have meetings, conferences, and informal networks but in most cases there is no structure specific to our profession to organize and coordinate the support of our peers.

Attending the national conference is not an option available to many in our profession, so it makes sense to organize our peers at a local/regional level to increase the effectiveness of our work. Chapters will provide these benefits to local and regional groups:

- coordination of required professional development trainings,
- two free registrations to the national conference for chapter delegates,
- revenue from NAHMMA membership fees for local programs,
- policy development and analysis at local, state, and national levels,
- technical issues forum,
- professional development and strategic planning meetings and seminars,
- coordinated regulatory interpretation between agencies,
- coordination of purchasing practices,
- statewide/regional conferences,
- host the national conference with revenue sharing, and
- other functions that support and enhance our profession.

Specifically, what's the point of a Chapter?

Some areas of the US has had regional conferences since the early 1990s where seminar presentations are given and standard trainings are provided. Some areas have electronic list-serves and an informal networks of peers. Even with all of this there has been only sporadic coordination on technical issues, policy analysis or formation, regulatory interpretation, professional development, and other common concerns and real needs that many of us share. We would have the potential to do much more if we were provided with the ability to speak and act in a more organized way.

In some areas, it has been difficult for the organizers of the local conference to manage the contracts, receive and hold funds over time, and provide the banking functions required to hold such conferences. In other areas this has been done by state sponsorship. The availability and reliability of state funds for these activities is variable and does not always provide all that we need as professionals. In a number of states, funding for all types of HHW and CESQG programs have been at risk or cut from year to year. In many areas of the country we need a more reliable method to keep our profession moving at the local/regional level.

In the Northwest the states have not been the primary funders of the regional conference since 1994. The finances for the Northwest conference were managed in a number of different ways. This has included primary financial roles provided by individual colleagues (using their own credit cards), working with the Association of Oregon Recyclers, and Portland Metro. While these worked, none of these financial arrangements were satisfactory for the long term.

To hold any conference, training, or even some kinds of meetings, some organization needs to be able to sign contracts and money needs to be available to reserve the site as well as to provide advance payments for catering, vendor services, printing, purchasing conference items from suppliers, and more. Depending on the current state priorities our professional needs may or may not be met from year to year. A NAHMMA Chapter will have a dedicated account formally established by NAHMMA using the national organization's Tax ID number but for the exclusive use by the Chapter for to benefit its members.

We have needs for professional development, continuing education, collaboration, meetings, training and exchange of ideas that would be enhanced by a local/regional structure to direct these resources and energies.

The NAHMMA Chapter structure allows us to do this. In addition, in the chapter formation document, there is a direct connection to the NAHMMA Board through the Chapters Committee. This connection can be used whenever there are issues that the Chapter wants to raise, support, or participate in. These could include issues concerning Chapter relations, training, policy, technical information, regulatory interpretations, etc. There are times when we may need to engage resources from the national organization or other Chapters to assist us. In addition, it is assumed that one or two delegates from each Chapter would attend the national conference each year as the designated Chapter representative and receive a conference registration fee waiver.

In a nutshell ...

The NAHMMA Chapter structure is designed to provide local direction and control over decisions and resources to provide networking, professional development and focused member services for the benefit of our colleagues within the Chapter boundary. In addition, the Chapter gains formal access to resources, talents, and ideas from sister Chapters and the national organization that can be used to support and enhance the Chapter members. It's all about us!