



ASTSWMO, Providing Pathways to Our
Nation's Environmental Stewardship Since 1974

December 10, 2020

Dear ASTSWMO Colleagues, Friends, and Family,

This past year, 2020, has been a year like no other I have experienced in my lifetime. It began normal enough, but soon was transformed due to a global pandemic. In less than one day, my working environment shifted from office to a makeshift home office. I will never forget Thursday, March 12, 2020--in the morning at a hastily convened management staff meeting, we were told to be prepared for some possible working environment shifts--by 3:00 p.m., 85% of my division work force was working from home. No easy feat for some of our more experienced, yet less techno-savvy employees, but that became our new reality (but hopefully NOT the "new normal"). I am sure that many of you had similar immediate transitions in your work environment.

Here in Utah, the following week, those few still reporting to the office experienced an earthquake, whose epicenter was only a few miles from our building, and its subsequent swarms of aftershocks. As if a pandemic was not enough, mother nature joined in to further remind us of our vulnerabilities. As I sat in my car outside of our building that morning (we had been evacuated) working the phone for emergency environmental concerns, I felt aftershocks roll through, which to say the least, were a little unnerving, although as a geologist, I found extremely fascinating (as long as my family and I were safe, which fortunately we were). As I looked around at the light poles in the parking lot and the glass and brick exterior of our building, I decided that day to forever change where I park at the office... (just in case).

As we took the summer getting more acclimated to "Teleworking," we were again reminded in Utah of how vulnerable to the elements we still were with several wildfires (requiring evacuations) threatening communities near where I live. I spent two concurrent weekends watching flames and smoke rise from fires within just a few miles to the southwest and northeast of my home. And, in September, hurricane winds along the Wasatch Front downed trees and caused lengthy power outages. Many of us were thinking "Will the calamities of this year never end?" I guess one could insert any number of election jokes here to answer that last question—not taking or suggesting any political sides here, only suggesting that the outcomes of elections also affect our lives. We will have a new governor in Utah beginning January, and transition planning at State agencies is in full swing.

Now, I am not sharing the above narrative for either sympathy or bragging rights (i.e., as in "My calamities are more significant than yours!"), for there were an abundance of events throughout the world compounding the challenges people were already facing due to Covid-19 (hurricanes, cyclones, volcanic eruptions, etc.) which, with its uncertain health impacts is real and scary enough. I only share my experience to demonstrate that for all of us, this has been a year none of us expected or wanted (I know, going out on a limb with that). Yet, here we are, continuing to work to fulfill our missions and mandates, dedicated to serving others through our chosen profession, and striving to protect and improve the world immediately around us.

The resiliency of humankind is astounding and awe-inspiring. And that is exactly how I feel about you, my ASTSWMO friends. You inspire me with your adaptability, innovation, compassion, and dedication. My heart goes out to our members and their families who have experienced the pandemic more personally, losing loved ones and friends to this insidious disease. And to those who have endured other tragedies and personal setbacks, we grieve and mourn with you. Know that you are not alone.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has altered how we gather and do business. We've missed out on meeting in person for 2020's Mid-Year Meeting in Alabama, as well as many symposiums, workshops, and conferences (RCRA Corrective Action, Superfund and Brownfields, the National Tanks Conference), and more recently, our Annual meeting in Washington DC. One of the most rewarding elements of being involved with ASTSWMO are the many opportunities to be together and learn from one another and to plan and discuss environmental policy implementation with our federal partners (EPA, DOD, DOE, etc.) and others. Although that is curtailed for now, due to the incredible efforts of Dania and the ASTSWMO Staff, we were able to move most of those critically important meetings online as virtual meetings. **This year the Subcommittees and Staff hosted more than 37 webinars with a total of 7,800 attendees!** The Annual Meeting alone showcased 15 webinar/meeting sessions with 1,200 participants. Although not the same as in-person, still helpful and positively impactful in continuing our important work and making ourselves more available to all of our members.

COVID-19 has not only altered our travel and meetings, but we are sensitive to the economic impact it has on our members. Budgets have been reduced due to economic uncertainty as a result of Covid-19. Preventative measures in the form of budget cuts were implemented during special legislative sessions convened in the late spring and summer. Recovering economic downturns can be significant. To that end, in consultation with our [Voting Members](#) and with approval from the [ASTSWMO Board](#), member fees have been "frozen" at the 2020 assessment amount for Fiscal Year 2021. Yet, as we all know, the important work we are engaged in does not lag or stop due to the pandemic and other challenges we experience. Consequently, finding ways to "lead through change" is not just the theme for our recently held ASTSWMO virtual Annual Meeting, but our daily routine as we navigate budget reductions, find ways to deal with the real concerns with emerging contaminants, and ensure effective strategy planning at the State and Territory (State) level as well as being engaged with our federal partners to do so on the national level.

My vision for the Association as we move forward is three-fold:

1. To build on the innovations we embraced due to Covid-19 and expand our use of technology to leverage more participation in ASTSWMO Symposiums, Conferences, and Meetings. The work goes on under what may be perceived as the negative umbrella of a pandemic but will be a positive opportunity to increase our engagement and interactions with our members, though maybe not in the traditional way.
2. Continue to build leadership capacity in the Association through Members-in-Action and targeted Focus Group and Task Force member outreach to State peers they represent. This allows us to grow laterally broadening our member base and building Association and State leaders for tomorrow.
3. Strengthen and enhance stakeholder involvement with our Federal partners and between our members. This increases our stakeholder value and contributions in identifying and setting environmental priorities nationally, regionally, and locally.

As you all know, we will have a new federal government administration come January, as well as some State leadership changes. This is an opportunity to build and strengthen on existing partnerships. The Association has already reached out to the transition team to make them aware of who we are and what we are about. We fully expect to continue our strong partnership with EPA and other federal agency leadership in the new administration.

As we look forward, I welcome Tim Ratsep (DE) as the new Vice-President and April Webb (KY) back as Secretary-Treasurer. I also welcome Jenny Chambers (MT) as our new [CERCLA and Brownfields Subcommittee](#) (CaBS) Chair and express gratitude to Amy Brittain (OK) (outgoing CaBs chair) for her tremendous contributions and service in that role. Thank you to our other Subcommittee Chairs for your continued service to ASTSWMO: Paula Bansch (IN), [Hazardous Waste](#); Cathy Jamieson (VT), [Materials Management](#); Matt Jones (NH), [Tanks](#); and Ruben Zamarripa (MO), [Federal Facilities](#).

Lastly, as this is the season of thanksgiving, I express my genuine and heartfelt thanks to Conchita Taitano (GU), outgoing President who will now assume the role and responsibilities of “Past-President” for her leadership and grace as Association President. Thank you, Conchita for your sacrifice in time to lead us this past year. Thank you to Chip Crocket (AL), outgoing Past-President for your continued contributions to the Association and for your steady mentoring hand and friendship. Thank you to our Board of Directors, whose care and concern for the work of the Association is leveraged exponentially through your dedication and commitment as Board members. Thank you to our Voting Members for your engagement and confidence in the Association’s leadership, particularly in me, whom you took a chance on and elected Vice-President a year ago. Thank you to those who serve as Chairs, Vice-Chairs and working members of Subcommittees, Task Forces, and Focus Groups. That is where the work of the Association is accomplished, and we are grateful for your collective contributions.

Make sure to go to our [homepage](#) and review the many resources these great volunteers have put together. And thank you to all our members who through your interactions, participation, collegiality, and brain trust, are the life blood and soul of this great Association. And finally, thank you to Dania, Charles, Kerry, Scott, TJ, and Maria, who are the heart of ASTSWMO, for their undying devotion and work in making this Association a recognized leader in environmental policy and implementation, and for helping us be better than we are individually.

Here is to a year of opportunity and innovation. I wish you all health and happiness, and continued success in your work, and in our unified efforts to strengthen ASTSWMO. Happy holidays!

Sincerely,
Brent

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brent H. Everett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brent" being the most prominent part.

ASTSWMO President