

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS
CSA1 Bill Id:AB 1288 Author:(Addis and Valencia)
As Amended Ver:September 04, 2025
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Makes various changes to the scope, education, training, and examination of registered environmental health specialists (REHS) and environmental health specialist (EHS) trainees as well as to the Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee.

Major Provisions

- 1) Adds body art and medical waste to the scope of practice of REHSs.
- 2) Updates the definition of an EHS trainee to include the requirement that they are engaged in an approved environmental health training plan.
- 3) Revises and recasts the environmental health training requirements to include training in at least three of the following primary elements: food safety, solid waste, liquid waste, water quality, housing and institutions, recreational health, body art, hazardous materials, or other Certified Unified Program Agency elements.
- 4) Allows additional training content to include any other primary element listed above or any of the following secondary elements: air sanitation, safety and accident prevention, land development and use, disaster sanitation, radiation, milk and dairy products, noise control, occupational health, medical waste, or vector control.
- 5) Extends the period of time that an EHS trainee is authorized to work under the supervision of a REHS, from three years to five years.
- 6) Changes requirements related to the REHS examination, deleting various restrictions on re-taking the examination and instead allowing an applicant who fails to pass the written examination to be reexamined after 90 days from the date of the previous examination.
- 7) Changes the executive officer of the Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee from the Chief of the Environmental Planning and Local Health Services Branch to the State Environmental Health Director and makes technical, clarifying changes to the terminology to distinguish local directors of environmental health from the State Environmental Health Director. Makes other changes to the Committee membership rules.
- 8) Increases the frequency of REHS meetings from at least twice annually to at least quarterly.
- 9) Requires the California Department of Public Health (DPH) to make its registry of all REHSs and all EHS trainees publicly available on its internet website within 90 days of the administration of an examination.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Delete references to science courses designated by the educational institution for science or clinical health care degrees and replace it with basic science regarding the educational requirements for the registration of REHS.

- 2) Clarify, for purposes of this bill, basic sciences include life sciences, natural sciences, physical sciences, and health sciences.
- 3) Prohibit social science courses such as sociology or psychology from counting toward the basic science requirements.

COMMENTS

What is an REHS? An REHS is a professional who is responsible for protecting public health and the environment by ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to environmental health. An REHS might conduct inspections and enforce regulations related to food safety, water and air quality, and hazardous waste management. REHSs also educate the public and businesses about environmental health issues and provide guidance on how to maintain a healthy and safe environment. REHSs work in a variety of settings, including government agencies, private businesses, and non-profit organizations.

The REHS program. The REHS program is administered by the Environmental Management Branch of DPH. The REHS program ensures that REHSs have met prescribed education, training, and experience requirements and have passed a comprehensive examination reflective of the demands encountered within the environmental health profession. According to DPH's website, the minimum requirements include a Bachelor's degree from a four year college including 30 semester units of basic science coursework (courses must be for "science" or "biology" majors); up to 18 months experience depending on education and training typically at a local county environmental health department; and, passage of a comprehensive exam held three times a year in the Sacramento and Los Angeles areas.

REHS Ad Hoc Committee. According to information provided by the California Conference of Directors of Environmental Health (CCDEH), co-sponsor of this bill, at the beginning of January 2025, CCDEH convened an Ad Hoc Committee to review the REHS statutes and build consensus on changes which would modernize the code and ease hiring hurdles at the local level. The 20-member committee is comprised of eight voting members (two members from each of CCDEH's four geographic regions); the CCDEH Executive Committee and partner organizations, including the County Health Executives Association of California, California Conference of Local Health Officers, and the California Environmental Health Association. The committee met weekly and moved systemically through the code, identifying sections that are producing hurdles to hiring and proposing new language to minimize the hurdles. Proposed changes were taken back to the environmental health (EH) directors in each region for approval which the voting members then used to cast their votes to recommend the changes to the CCDEH Executive Council proposed by this bill.

What does this bill do? This bill makes various changes to the scope, education, training and examination of REHS and EHS trainees as well as to the Environmental Health Specialist Registration Committee, including extending the maximum training period from three years to five years to allow more time for EHS trainees to prepare for and pass the REHS examination and makes updates to the certification and training process with the intent of helping to retain the skilled environmental health professionals needed to protect public health. Please see the Assembly Health Committee analysis for more details on the major provisions and additional background.

According to the Author

Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS) play a critical role in protecting public health. The author states that REHS help ensure that the places we eat, the water we drink, and the places we live comply with health and safety standards so that we can enjoy our daily lives free from hazards caused by unsanitary or dangerous conditions. The author contends that this bill provides much-needed updates to the REHS trainee experience that will help retain and train skilled, science-focused professionals. The author states that this bill will strengthen California's public health organizational infrastructure, improve regulatory efficiency, and ensure that these professionals have the training and experience necessary to not just succeed, but also excel in their official positions once they pass their exams. The author concludes that evolving health and safety conditions require a workforce that can evolve with them and this will help our REHS meet those challenges head on.

Arguments in Support

The County Health Executives Association of California (CHEAC) and California Association of Environmental Health Administrators (CAEHA) are the co-sponsors of this bill and state that certification for the REHS program is administered by DPH. The program ensures that certified REHS's have met adequate education, training and experience requirements and have passed a comprehensive state examination. While working towards certification, individuals may be employed as a REHS trainee by local health/environmental health departments for up to three years. However, limited examination offerings and strict time limitations governing how often a trainee may take the exam have resulted in trainees being reassigned or released – even if they wish to continue to pursue a career as a certified REHS. The current state exam passage rate averages around 60%. The co-sponsors note that this bill supports strengthening and sustaining the REHS workforce pipeline by extending the time needed to pass the REHS exam, increasing REHS testing opportunities, enhancing local training plans, and modernizing REHS educational requirements. They continue that this bill also provides more opportunities for entry-level employees to continue their careers with local health departments/environmental health departments.

Arguments in Opposition

None.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, unknown ongoing General Fund costs, likely low hundreds of thousands, for the California Department of Public Health for state administration.

VOTES:**ASM HEALTH: 16-0-0**

YES: Bonta, Chen, Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Rogers, Carrillo, Flora, Mark González, Krell, Patel, Patterson, Celeste Rodriguez, Sanchez, Schiavo, Sharp-Collins, Stefani

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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