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### **NEW JERSEY NURSES ADD THEIR VOICE TO NATIONAL EFFORT TO PROMOTE “ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH”**

TRENTON (NJ) – The New Jersey State Nurses Association (NJSNA) participated in a four-day “unity meeting” in Oracle, Arizona, with health care leaders from across the United States earlier this month to demonstrate the Association’s commitment to promoting the incorporation of environmental health into every aspect of nursing in New Jersey.

The conference (December 3-7, 2008), which was billed as an “Environmental Health Unity Meeting,” was attended by Sharon Rainer, RN, Deputy Executive Director for the NJSNA. The meeting was a “re-union” of active environmental health leaders from across the country who gathered together to plan, strategize and unite on a commitment to incorporate environmental health into every aspect of nursing – from advocacy, to research to practice -for all RNs. NJSNA is one of several Constituent Member Associations (CMAs) of the American Nurses Association (ANA) that has taken an active role in environmental health.

“There really isn’t any more important work that nurses can pursue at this time” said Ms. Rainer, RN who will serve on the interim steering committee for the newly formed alliance of environmentally concerned nurses. “The profession of nursing was founded on principles of prevention of disease and illness, today’s environmental health challenges demand that we return to that foundation. We have immense power to bring science and passion to the critical environmental health issues at hand.”

The American Nurses Association has promoted policies which make registered nurses “the premier advocates” for:

- The safety and quality of patient care;
- The health and safety of registered nurses and other health care professionals and health care workers; and,
- Health care practices which do no harm to the public health environment outside the settings in which health care is delivered.

Barbara Sattler, RN, DrPH, FAAN Environmental Health Education Center University of Maryland School of Nursing and her staff led the four-day meeting which was made possible by a grant from the Kendeda Project. Other participants in the meeting included, Giny Harshey-Meade, CEO Ohio State Nurses Association, Brenda Afzal, RN, MS Director of Health Programs, University of Maryland, Lillian H. Mood, RN, MPH Editor, Nursing Health & the Environment Retired, Director of Risk Communication for the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental, Karen Ballard, MA, RN President, NYSNA and Chair, Health Care Without Harm Nurses Working Group, Catherine Dodd, RN, PhD, FAAN, Deputy Chief of Staff Health and Human Services for San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom.

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The group believes that nurses, who are one of the most trusted sources of information by the public, must be in a position to both respond to questions about the environment and its relationship to health with credible, evidence-based information, as well as provide leadership in making the necessary changes in our policies and practice to protect and promote human health.

“In the words of Barbara Sattler, we must prepare nurses to be a cut above the average citizen with regard to their knowledge of environmental health issues”, said Ms. Rainer.

NJSNA began an Environmental Health Task Force two years ago when Rainer obtained a Health Care Without Harm grant. The task force has become a part of the NJSNA Congress on Policy and Practice under the leadership of Ann Vitale, RN (former chair of the Congress) and continues under the leadership of the current chair, Eleanor Dietrich, RN.

“Our current president, Dr. Barbara Chamberlain, has a deep passion about the environment and nursing. We expect our task force to be very instrumental in connecting with practicing nurses to disseminate resources and information to help them in their practice and in their communities”, said Ms. Rainer.

The New Jersey State Nurses Association, a constituent member of the American Nurses Association, is organized for individual professional nurse members through its regions to participate in activities for the advancement of nurses and nursing and to promote the profession as an essential, independent and distinct social service. In accordance with its philosophy and bylaws the NJSNA, comprised of professional nurses, advances the profession, delineating the practice of nursing through standard setting, education and research, formulating public policy and fostering excellence and quality of health delivery in the State of New Jersey. Please visit our webpage at [www.njsna.org](http://www.njsna.org) for additional information.