

RUTGERS

 New Jersey Agricultural
 Experiment Station

Chuck Khan: Warren County Health Department Registered Environmental Health Specialist

Hard work and in-depth training is necessary to be an REHS, but “the reward is great.”
 Chuck Khan,
 REHS

REHS is a stable, secure career for anyone interested in health and science.

A Diverse Background

A native of India with several different careers on his resume, Chuck Khan’s journey to becoming a Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS) with the Warren County Health Department was a long one. After leaving India in 1983, where he was a practicing veterinarian for five years, Khan took a nine-month course in computer science. He was quickly earning a six-figure salary as a computer programmer with some of the United States’ top corporations. “The job was wonderful,” says Khan, who enjoyed the challenging, high-tension environment for 18 years. But after September 11, Khan was a victim of massive layoffs, and he suddenly found himself with a lot of choices to make. After nearly two decades of back-breaking work, he had to decide between returning to India for a more relaxed lifestyle of finding more work in the United States to support his son, an aspiring pharmacist. Once his son was accepted to pharmacy school, the choice was easy. Khan began looking on the Internet for a new career in the United States.



Khan is satisfied by his new career in the health field.

Finding Public Health

Khan remained interested in the health sciences, and his background in veterinary medicine immediately drew him to jobs in the health field. Khan’s Internet search quickly led him to Rutgers University Office of Continuing Professional Education’s Environment and Public Health course description. The EPH course runs for seven weeks in the summer and is followed by a 200-hour internship at a real health department. Students’ instructors and internship supervisors teach technical skills and gives students the experience necessary to obtain their REHS license. Khan decided to register for the course to receive the REHS training he needed to land an environmental health job.

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Chuck Khan, REHS

Health inspectors examine a number of environments for safety, including restaurants, swimming pools, and other public venues. They need thorough knowledge of septic systems and animal control, as well as intensive food safety and epidemiology training. Khan’s medical knowledge prepared him for some of the biological aspects of public health inspection, but the environmental side was completely new to him. “What is my background?” he asks. “I didn’t know anything about public health when I started this course.” Due to the course’s intensive environmental and public health training, however, Khan learned what he needed to know to pass the NJ REHS exam. “The course is not a piece of cake,” he explains, “especially for people with my background...people who come from foreign countries, for them, I’m saying you have to be on top of it.” The language barrier may have made the already-difficult course even more challenging, but “the reward is great,” he says. After completing the course and passing the NJ REHS exam in 2002, Khan’s instructors helped him find an REHS job as a Warren County Health Department Public Health Inspector. He has been there for six years.

Starting a New Career

After taking EPH, Khan felt very prepared for the challenging NJ REHS licensing exam.

Since earning his REHS license, Khan has enjoyed what he calls a “stress-free lifestyle” and a wonderful career. Public health inspection provides Khan with the perfect opportunity to return to his original interest in science and health, making his most recent career choice especially enjoyable and rewarding. “The job is fun,” he says. “It makes you feel big.” Though he once enjoyed the fast-paced, high-pressure work of being a computer programmer, his new lifestyle is one of the things he says he values most about being a health inspector.

After completing the EPH course, not only was Khan prepared to pass the licensing exam, he has continued to use what he learned during those seven weeks to become a successful health inspector with ease. “The kind of education you’ve got, the confidence that you know everything in your job, that makes you feel happy and easy to work with. You go with confidence,” he says. Health inspection often involves difficult work and a lot of time spent out of the office, but Khan still says he prefers his current job to both computer science and veterinary medicine. “This is a wonderful job, I tell you,” he insists. “No job can challenge this job.”