

SUSTAINABLE RETIREMENT

Interview by: Tom Curry

Journal guest interviewer and Arizona environmental professional Tom Curry met recently with Dr. Nicholas R. Hild, recently retired Professor and Associate Chair at the Arizona State University College of Technology and Innovation, to speak with him about his extended career in the environmental field in Arizona and ask for his reflections going forth into retirement. Dr. Hild is now Emeritus Professor and Senior Sustainability Scientist in the College of Technology and Innovation. He can be reached by e mail at drnick@asu.edu. He also continues to write his column for the Journal of Environmental Management Arizona: Sustainability and Sustainable Development.



Nicholas R. Hild, PhD.

TOM CURRY: Not to say you are old, but you have been around the valley for quite some time, and have seen, and more to the point, participated in the developing environmental field pretty much since its beginning. An environmental professional in the valley, if they have been here for more than just a year or two, is sure to have heard your name in conversation. You have worked on the Motorola 52nd Street TCE contamination, since before it became a federal Superfund site; you were instrumental in the formation of, if I am not mistaken, the valley's first environmental association, and have been a driving force in the development of ASU's College of Technology's Environmental Technology Management curriculum.

But there may be someone reading this article that has just entered the environmental field and may not have heard of you, so let's set the stage with a few questions about how this all started.

Where did you get your education, and what was your introduction into the environmental field, if it was called that even, back when you started?

DR. NICHOLAS R. HILD: Thank you, Tom. I graduated from the University of Iowa with a BS in Mechanical Engineering in 1972, and an MS in Environmental Engineering in 1973. and I received my PhD in Environmental Engineering Management

from Union University and Graduate School in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1979.

I became a part-time PhD student at ASU beginning in 1974. Then, working in the semiconductor industry as an environmental engineer, I realized I wanted more than a traditional PhD program so I began searching for an accredited University that offered opportunities to combine coursework with dissertation research that focused on the (then) paucity of environmental law as it related to the management of environmental activities in industry, at that time a novel idea that traditional academe found difficult to embrace. The programs I found at Union allowed me to take PhD level courses at any NCA-accredited university which could be a part of my academic program at Union, and they liked my dissertation ideas that allowed me to conduct my dissertation research any where I chose—a path pioneering the Extended Education model under the University Without Walls program that the Union had founded in the late 1960's.

QUOTE

My Friend, "Dr. Nick"

"I met professor Dr. Nicholas R. Hild in 1987, as the instructor in my first class on RCRA hazardous waste regulations. It turns out that it was also a very fortuitous event, because I met SAEMS co-founder, Glynis Coulter, in that class. As they say: "the rest is history".

He started out by humorously telling us that it would be wise to have strong "religious connections" if we planned to work in this field. (Sometimes divine intervention is the only option left). He also said that we should learn how to spell the three most important words in RCRA: COMPLIANCE, FINES and JAIL.

Also, during his lecture, he kept mentioning "why waste water". After several times, I also began to wonder: "why waste water?" (I learned later that Why? Wastewater was a TSD facility in El Paso, TX!) Talk about a greenhorn!

Clearly, Dr. Hild has been a major positive force in the state-wide environmental community over many years. He has continually provided support, counsel and guidance to so many lost souls out there. We owe him a great debt of gratitude for his many contributions."

*Richard H. Carter
Carter Affiliates, Inc. (CARE)*



*Sustainability
and
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*Will I Continue
Next Issue!*

Nicholas R. Hild, PhD.

As it turned out later, after being employed as a Research Professor at ASU, I used that experience to model the Hazardous Waste Management program that I started in 1985. That led to courses being taught all over the Valley and became the basis for our Extended Education program in Environmental Technology Management, that is now ranked first among programs offering Environmental Management academic programs at US universities.

TOM: ADEQ did not exist, with environmental regulations in Arizona being enforced locally, or within the framework of ADHS. You've seen an incredible change in the development of Arizona's environmental regulatory framework. What was the regulatory scenario when you were first working in the field?

QUOTE

"I have not only had the great privilege of being a student of Dr. Nick's in ASU's Environment Technology Management graduate program, but I have also had the unique pleasure of working with him on environmental policy issues affecting the State. Whether in my role as a student, an environment and natural resources paralegal, or as an Arizona State Representative, my education of environmental issues is ongoing under Dr. Nick's tutelage. This is the reason that Dr. Nick is a high-quality educator. We are more than his students, we are his investments. The more time and attention given, the better the investment succeeds. That is how Dr. Nick educates and that is why he will always be an educator and mentor to so many of us."

*Rep. Amanda Reeve
Arizona State House of Representatives*

DR. HILD: At the University of Iowa, I took several courses in my Environmental Engineering masters program in the University Law School that dealt with "environmental policy". At that time, in 1972, I could see that this whole field of environmental management would be effected by policies at the federal level that would lead to a whole new body of laws, environmental, health and safety, that would require professionals who were going to be in industries, to become conversant with the whole body of laws

and statutes just to be able to "manage" those EH&Safety activities for their companies.

The first Earth Day in April of 1970 opened my eyes to the need for professional environmental managers to be conversant with not only all the technical tools available, like water and wastewater treatment technologies, air pollution control technologies, solid and hazardous waste management tools, etc, but to "be in compliance" with whatever laws and/or regulations were impacting their respective industry. At that time, the whole "laws" area was in its infancy since the EPA was just being created and the first major statute, the WQAA of 1972, was still being written. Thus, I looked into my future—and saw that it appeared that future environmental, health and/or safety law was going to play a major part in my life. And that certainly was the case as the whole regulatory environment underpins the work of environmental professionals in the real world today.

TOM: With all the changes over the years, what is your opinion of the direction Arizona's political machine has taken environmental protection of the state? What about the direction of the federal government?

DR. HILD: Arizona seems to swing, environmentally, on who gets elected to the State legislature: if it's conservative in the Governor's chair then usually the enforcement by agencies and the general direction the legislation takes is "soft" on environment. If it's a democrat in the governor's chair, then ADEQ and ADWR get to do more to enforce existing state environmental laws and pass better laws that are more environmentally favorable. They always resist

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whatever the Fed wants to do so that's sort of a given that, if you are in the regulated community, you need to know so it helps you do your job for your industry.

Right now, we have a conservative governor and house majority leader, but we have Rep. Amanda Reeve as House Environment Committee Chair who, while she is a republican, still is pro-environment enough that she will work with her leadership to get sensible legislation passed—so that is a positive thing for the State. And it is the reason that being a responsible environmental professional in Arizona means you have to be involved in the State's legislative process on a continuing basis, as well as maintaining vigilance with the Federal environmental legislation and what EPA is up

Continued next page.



PHOTO: Dr. Nick Hild, Left, with Tom Curry, Right

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to, just to do your job. That is why our ETM program has the emphasis on knowing and understanding how the regulations work and how they provide us with the tools to meet compliance requirements.

TOM: Is there a lack of “balance” between business protection and environmental protection? What does the public and industry need to do to reach a mutually acceptable and protective set of regulations?

DR. HILD: I don't perceive a lack of balance between business and environmental protection based on my own ... experience as an environmental manager in industry for more than 11 years and a consultant to industry and government agencies for the past 20 years. I think our industries understand now, in the 21st century, that there's a lot of upside to managing their chemicals and wastes properly, and even beyond compliance, and a lot of downside in today's regulatory environment to NOT doing that job properly: there also are more financial incentives today for doing the “sustainable” management process, EMS's and ISO 14001, that lead to huge savings at the bottom line, so I'm really not seeing the intentional mismanagement of EH&S that we had going back into the pre-EPA and pre-EQAct days. I think the ever increasing number of students we have seen in our ETM program at ASU and the fact that they are all being sought after for jobs as managers in industry, is evidence that there is a good balance between these two entities.

TOM: With the growth of the environmental industry in the valley, what was the driving force to start an environmental association?

DR. HILD: Back in 1980, the RCRA and CERCLA hit the “environmental management” scene like a slap in the face. It reinforced the whole idea that there needed to be a better, and more directed, effort to managing SOLID wastes in the country. There were so many sites that were contaminated by UST leaks and mismanaged chemicals being disposed of in places they shouldn't have been, that it became obvious that this was a totally new emphasis area that needed professionals who had proper technical and management skills. Several people in the Valley recognized there needed to be an “association” of all these various professionals from a lot of disciplines brought together under one umbrella to share information and help conduct remediation and regulatory advisement—people like lawyers, agency regulators, remediation consultants, engineers and laboratories, and industry EH&S personnel who could share their expertise for a common goal like getting our environment cleaned up and managing chemicals and wastes properly. That is why the association started out as the HAZWaste Society, and our first meeting saw over 50 interested professionals in attendance. It grew from that point to become a very influential organization that had heads of all the agencies and environmental lawyers alike seeking the Society's advice about proper management programs across the State.



I should mention, by the way, that the environmental

professionals at that time who were in Pima county, were car pooling to our monthly meetings for the first two years until they decided to start their own association to focus on environmental issues in southern Arizona. That association, known as the Southern

Arizona Environmental Management Society (SAEMS) has become very successful and their professionals are playing a significant role in both Pima County, and State legislation today—so congratulations to them for what they've accomplished in southern Arizona.

TOM: Over the years, you've seen a lot of change in the business of the environment, as well as changes in the regulatory agencies. What are the biggest, most significant changes over the years? Which are the good changes, and which are the bad changes? Any prediction for the future? Anything you wish had turned out differently?

DR. HILD: I think the biggest changes have occurred over the years after RCRA and CERCLA were enacted, primarily because there was environmental law that really forced the State to make sure that industry had compliance programs that were consistent with Federal edicts in such Acts as Water Quality Act Amendments, Clean Air Act Amendments, Solid and Hazwaste Acts like RCRA and CERCLA, and the Pollution Prevention Act of 1990. Once industry, and even the ADEQ and DWR regulators, understood their own role in meeting and enforcing those management requirements, it allowed industry and businesses, even small businesses, to understand exactly what they had to do to be “in compliance” and that really was solidified in the '90's—it was very much different from the formative years of the '70's and early '80's for professionals in the EH&S field—then, in the early 2000's there became a shift toward this new mantra called “sustainability” that is fast becoming the management priority for industries and business in the US.

But a cautionary note here: if we are turning out graduates in University programs who do not possess the technical know-how and chemistry, physics, and engineering controls knowledge—graduates who think only that somehow an understanding of environmental policies will allow them to provide their employers with sustainable solutions for industries and businesses, we are fooling ourselves. “Sustainability” programs have popped up at numerous colleges and universities in the past five years that basically have no “technical” requirements, and I believe those students are being scammed—there will be a time when industries and businesses will need to realize that there is more to managing/ implementing “sustainable” EH&S

QUOTE

"It ain't often you will see a tree hugger in levis and cowboy boots. But that is exactly what you will see when you meet Dr. Nick."

*Mark Salem
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initiatives than knowing the language of sustainability. It is too early to tell at this point, but when those graduates of those "non-technical" degree programs begin to populate the jobs, they will see that there is nothing they are able to contribute because they don't have technical insight into how sustainable technologies actually work, so I think you will see that there needs to be another look taken at what skills are needed to be a contributor to our overall environmental health in this country.

TOM: What is in the future for Dr. Nick?

DR. HILD: It is too early in my retirement to say for sure but I am happy that I had the opportunity to be a Manager of Environmental Services for a hugh semiconductor company for 11 years, because all the things I learned about remedial investigations and waste management were in those years of experience, together with the 5+ years I spent as a Director and Principal for a large environmental consulting firm that was one of the two WQARF (State Superfund) contractors in 1988 where I got to use the tools I'd learned to actually conduct remedial investigations and Phase II studies throughout Arizona. I used that time to also learn about and work with ADEQ and legislative representatives to understand how to get things done. And, of course, all that was the foundation for beginning our academic program at ASU, in 1985, that has become the number one environmental management program in the country. Then, being able to be a part of a major EPA-funded Brownfields study in the minority community of Naco, was a highlight for me where I got to actually see a community come together to implement a redevelopment of several acres that had been contaminated with cross-border wastewater effluent. It was a 9-year project that provided hands-on experience to a dozen ETM students while providing me yet another great experience in the real world; what's not to like about all that?

Going forward, I plan to stay involved in the environmental arena by serving on legislative sub-committees and serving on

organizations like the Arizona Environmental Strategic Alliance Advisory Council. As an Emeritus Professor, I still maintain my office on the Polytechnic campus and my ASU email (drnick@asu.edu). I am planning on doing more research as projects become available, and I have a website (Worldsleadingexpert.com) where I manage several publications by leading experts in their field. My Second Edition of Prostate Cancer 2.0 is my first entry on the site and there will be more going forward, as I screen materials that are appropriate for the site.

TOM: Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not talked about?

DR. HILD: It has been a great career and I am happy to have had the many friends and professional associations that have been a part of my life for the past 35+ years here in Arizona. I wish I could list everyone by name but, for the most part, they are from my days in industry and the HAZWaste Society, as well as the literally hundreds of students that have gone on to make me proud that I was a teacher and mentor to them, during their time in the ETM program. I just hope all of them will send me an e mail from time to time, and let me know how they are doing.

And to Jim Thrush, a thank you for letting me write for the Journal of Environmental Management Arizona; it has truly been a highlight of my career. Thank you!

TOM: Thank you, Dr. Nick, and our best wishes on your retirement and future endeavors from from myself and, if I may speak for them, my fellow cohort graduates from the ASU ETM program, from the Journal, and from our children's, children's, children!

Nicholas R. Hild, PhD, can be reached at drnick@asu.com, and you can continue to find his column in the Journal.

Tom Curry is an environmental supervisor with CAP, with over 25 years experience in Arizona's environmental field and six years in regulatory enforcement with ADEQ. Tom can be reached at 623-869-2353 or by email at tcurry@cap-az.com.

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