



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF SANITARIANS, INC.

Prestigious Recognition for Environmental Health Professionals

Definition of Sanitarian

The term “Sanitarian” is derived from the Latin word “*sanitas*” meaning health¹. A Sanitarian is a professional who can assess, implement, and recommend practices to control biological, chemical and physical risks present in the home, work and recreational environments that could cause illness or injury.

A Sanitarian uses scientific methods while defining the potential hazards, assessing risk, and evaluating exposures in the environment while finding suitable substitutes, which are harmless or less harmful.

Working in conjunction with other Public Health practitioners – the Sanitarian uses the art and science of Public Health to protect and improve the health of people and their communities. This work is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and advocating policies to detect, prevent, and respond to infectious diseases through the organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, public and private communities, and individuals. Sanitarians are qualified to suggest alternative safe processes, methods, and appropriate control mechanisms to manage environmental health risks and improve quality of life.¹

Scope of Practice

Scope of practice describes the procedures, actions, and processes that Sanitarians undertakes in keeping with the terms of their professional credential. The scope of practice is limited to that which the law allows for specific education and experience, and specific demonstrated competency.

The ambit (or types of environmental health risks) of the Sanitarian’s work has expanded over the years to include:

1. the traditional areas of air quality, drinking water quality, food protection, hazardous materials & wastes, housing, solid waste management, wastewater, zoonotic & vector-borne disease control;
2. specialty areas in the hospitality, institutional, home, radiological safety, recreational areas and facilities, and work environments;
3. disaster and emergency preparedness, response and recovery; including natural disasters and pandemic; and,

¹ Sanitarians were important public officials during the Sanitary Reform Movements of the 19th Century, leading some people to assume that Sanitarians deal only with sanitation and biological agents of disease. However, the U.S. government recognizes the term “Sanitarian” as a professional employment category covering all aspects of Environmental Health, and legitimately so since Sanitarians, whether in public or private practice, deal with all manner of environmental risks to human health, including biological, chemical and physical agents, reflecting the broader definition derived from the Latin term for health. So regardless of whatever job title a person may have (EH Specialist, EH Investigator, EH Officer, Industrial Hygienist, etc.) they are doing the work of a Sanitarian.

4. research into the causes and mechanisms of environmentally related disease and injury.

Sanitarians are responsible for carrying out measures for protecting public health, including administering and enforcing legislation related to environmental health and providing support to minimize health and safety hazards. They are involved in a variety of activities, for example inspecting food facilities, investigating public health nuisances, and implementing disease control. Sanitarians are focused on prevention, consultation, investigation, and education of the community regarding health risks and maintaining a safe environment. Sanitarians bring to the position an understanding of microbiology, risk assessment, environmental science and technology, food science and the built environment as well as the skills and knowledge related to the tracking and control of communicable disease, conducting workplace safety assessments and accident investigation. They have strong investigative skills and an understanding of the application of legislation related to public health and the environment.

Range of Practice:

Sanitarians often work for government agencies at the federal, state, tribal or local level, but could also represent private business and industry compliance interests, auditing, environmental health evaluation, and quality assurance. The following is an outline of the Sanitarian range of practice:

Government

- Regulatory – Federal, State, Tribal, County and Local public health agencies
 - USPHS – Parks & Vessels
- Non regulatory – USPHS - Monitoring, Research, Advisory
- Military – self-regulatory
- Academia – research and teaching

Non-governmental, Business and Industry

- Healthcare, Custodial and Educational institutions.
- Hospitality and Recreational facilities.
- Business, Industry and Contractors
- Biomedical and Biological Safety
- Food Production and Food Safety
- Industrial Hygiene, Occupational Safety and Environmental Control
- Non-governmental Organizations and Associations
- Academia – Research and Teaching