

## ▶ DIRECT FROM AAS



Robert W. Powitz, MPH, PhD, RS,  
CP-FS, DLAAS

## An Introduction and History of the American Academy of Sanitarians



**Editor's Note:** In an effort to provide environmental health professionals with relevant information and tools to further the profession, their careers, and themselves, NEHA has teamed up with the American Academy of Sanitarians (AAS) to publish three columns a year in the *Journal*. AAS is an organization that “elevates the standards, improves the practice, advances the professional proficiency, and promotes the highest levels of ethical conduct among professional sanitarians in every field of environmental health.” Membership with AAS is based upon meeting certain high standards and criteria, and AAS members represent a prestigious list of environmental health professionals from across the country.

Through the column, information from different AAS members who are subject-matter experts with knowledge and experience in a multitude of environmental health topics will be presented to the *Journal's* readership. This column strengthens the ties between both associations in the shared purposes of furthering and enhancing the environmental health profession.

Robert W. Powitz received his undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia and his MPH and PhD from the University of Minnesota. He is currently a forensic sanitarian in private practice and part-time health director in Franklin and Lebanon, Connecticut.

The American Academy of Sanitarians (AAS) is an organization that elevates the standards of the sanitarian profession, improves the practice, advances professional proficiency, and promotes the highest levels of ethical conduct among its members in every field of environmental health.

The primary purpose of AAS is to enhance professional recognition. In doing so, its aim is to improve the applied sciences that

encompass environmental health through certification and educational initiatives. AAS recognizes those sanitarians who excel in their chosen vocation and who demonstrate exceptional knowledge, skills, and attributes as professionals in government, academia, the uniformed services, and in industry. AAS actively promotes education through its professional advancement and its commitment to scholarship and mentoring.

### A Bit of History

The Civil War transformed the sanitarian movement from the polemic prose of Victorian sages to real vocational efforts dedicated to protecting the public's health. In the decade following the turn of the 20th century, several states enacted licensure programs for health (aka sanitary) inspectors to ensure competency in the interpretation of environmental and public health regulations. Following World War II, the sanitarian's role expanded even further with the growth of the economy and global commerce. As a profession, we applied new concepts in the environmental sciences to institutions, industry, and other governmental programs tangential to our traditional role of community code enforcement. Through our work in the regulatory arena and together with our collective knowledge, skills, and attributes acquired through experience and continuing research, our profession became known for its expertise in contamination and infection control. Employers started seeking competency not only through a credentialing program, but also through the demonstration of communication, management skills, and academic accomplishment. The professional designation of “sanitarian” truly came of age by midcentury.

AAS began in November 1956, when the Sanitarians Joint Council (SJC) held an organizational meeting at the American Public Health Association (APHA) Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The professionals who made up the SJC were representatives from three associations whose membership embraced the majority of sanitarians at that

time. These organizations were APHA; the International Association of Milk, Food, and Environmental Sanitarians, later called the International Association for Food Protection; and the National Association of Sanitarians, which became the National Environmental Health Association.

The meeting of the SJC resulted in a charter dated November 14, 1956. The original charter had five basic objectives:

1. to develop a uniform definition for “sanitarian”;
2. to promote the professional status of the sanitarian;
3. to develop a Sanitarian Specialty Board;
4. to draft a recommended uniform law for the registration of sanitarians; and
5. the development and promotion for the educational requirements and other qualifications for the sanitarian profession.

In July 1961 the SJC completed the basics of the original objectives as well as a plan for the certification of sanitarians. The recommendations, known as the “Proposed Model Act,” were subsequently accepted by all SJC members. It was published in the affiliated journals and distributed widely to as many political jurisdictions as possible.

With the completion of the “Proposed Model Act,” an updated definition of sanitarian and the acceptance of a Sanitarian Specialty Board, the council created the American Inter-Society Board for the Certification of Sanitarians on October 5, 1964. On October 20, 1965, the board changed the name of the organization to the American Intersociety Academy for the Certification of Sanitarians (AIACS) to reflect its expanded involvement in the profession. The academy was formally incorporated in the state of Indiana on March 14, 1966.

Financial assistance for the newly formed academy came from the three founding organizations that made up the original SJC. Each organization gave the academy a \$1,000 interest-free loan that was paid back in a little over two years.

The 12 original founding members of the newly formed academy board were Harold S. Adams, A. Harry Bliss, Emil T. Chanlett, E.E. Diddams, B. Russell Franklin, Larry J. Gordon, William V. Hickey, William C. Miller, Jr., A. Faegin Parrish, Verne C. Reierson, Edwin L. Ruppert, and Darold W. Taylor.

The designation of “Diplomate” was incorporated into the bylaws for those pro-

fessionals who had at least 12 years experience as a sanitarian, five of which were in an administrative or supervisory position, and who met all the other membership requirements. In 1975 the AIACS underwent yet another name change for simplicity and for ease of recognition as a professional group. The name “American Academy of Sanitarians” was adopted.

### Today’s Association

AAS invites and encourages sanitarians with qualities of outstanding competence and leadership to become certified as a Diplomate. Certification as a Diplomate is awarded only after careful scrutiny of the applicant by a board of his or her peers. The certification process is quite unique. It differentiates a professional sanitarian who is registered by examination and one who is qualified under demanding standards such as academic achievement, publication, community participation and leadership, credentialing in allied environmental health sciences, and demonstration of leadership in the workplace. Becoming a Diplomate in AAS denotes achievement of a high standard of professionalism with marked distinction, and testifies to a record of accomplishment in the field of environmental health. It bestows professional status and gives prestige to the holders of the Diplomate certification. Since its inception, over 585 professional sanitarians were awarded Diplomate status in AAS.

In 1999, AAS created the certification of a Diplomate Laureate to recognize Diplomates who have demonstrated exceptional professional growth, accomplishment, and leadership in the sanitarian profession. The Laureate must demonstrate longevity in the profession in addition to meeting six additional criteria that include extraordinary accomplishments in the field of environmental health and the professional practice as a sanitarian.

The Academy also awards Diplomate Emeritus certification to those Diplomates who have retired after an exceptional career, and the title of Honorary Diplomate is conferred upon those individuals who have advanced the sanitarian profession and the field of public health but are not sanitarians themselves. AAS has eight laureate, 12 emeritus, and five honorary members.

### Awards

In 1981 AAS initiated its Davis Calvin Wagner Sanitarian Award. This is an annual award to recognize a Diplomate sanitarian who has attained a status of distinction as a professional. The award is made possible through the devotion and generosity of Assistant Surgeon General (Ret.) Carruth J. Wagner, MD, U.S. Public Health Service, in memory of his brother. It reflects Dr. Wagner’s respect and admiration for the professional sanitarian. To date, 25 Diplomates are recipients of this honor.

In addition to individual recognition, AAS is both a participant and cosponsor of the Samuel J. Crumbine Award. The Crumbine Award, given by the Conference for Food Protection, is awarded annually to a local environmental health jurisdiction that demonstrates excellence and continual improvement in a comprehensive food protection program. The purpose of the award is to encourage improvement and stimulate public interest in foodservice sanitation. The award is named in honor of Dr. Samuel J. Crumbine (1862–1954), a sanitarian-physician and public health pioneer who was renowned for his innovative methods of improving disease prevention through public health initiatives.

### To Learn More

We encourage everyone to visit our Web site: [www.sanitarians.org](http://www.sanitarians.org). In addition to a listing of the professionals awarded the Diplomate status and qualifications for membership, it also has an archive that contains a unique collection of member publications, presentations, papers, and videos from not only those who created the modern practice of environmental health, but those who continue to revitalize and improve its service to mankind. In addition, the site offers an extremely valuable scientific vocabulary dictionary that provides Latin and Greek word roots, as well as a comprehensive and fascinating history of the U.S. Public Health Service originally published in 1923. 🐼

*Corresponding Author:* Robert W. Powitz, Forensic Sanitarian, R.W. Powitz & Associates, PC, P.O. Box 502, Old Saybrook, CT 06475-0502. E-mail: [Powitz@sanitarian.com](mailto:Powitz@sanitarian.com).