

▶ DIRECT FROM AAS



Felix I. Zemel,
MCP, MPH, REHS/RS,
CEHT, HHS, DAAS

What Is a Diplomate, and What Does It Do?



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.

Felix Zemel received his undergraduate degree from Wentworth Institute of Technology and his graduate degrees from Boston University. He is a practicing sanitarian, with a private consulting practice in Needham, Massachusetts.

When you read your issue of the *Journal*, do you—like me—look at the authors' credentials and affiliation(s)? I admit it; I provide different weights to articles based upon these factors. For practice-based articles, I look at both the academic and the professional credentials of the author(s). Last year, Ken Runkle used the term “pracademic” in describing an individual who crossed the boundaries of academia and practice (Runkle, 2014). One way

to spot a pracademic at least in the *Journal* is by seeing the letters DAAS or DLAAS in an author's listing of credentials. These credentials are bestowed upon qualified sanitarians that meet the requirements or certification as a Diplomate and/or Diplomate Laureate of the American Academy of Sanitarians (AAS).

What Is a Diplomate?

DAAS and DLAAS are two levels of certification as a Diplomate of the AAS. In April, Rob-

ert Powitz described those who achieve the Diplomate certification as attaining “achievement of a high standard of professionalism with marked distinction, and ... a record of accomplishment in the field of environmental health (Powitz, 2015).” In addition to certification by examination, which is required to become registered as a sanitarian, the AAS requires applicants for the Diplomate certification to meet certain additional professional and academic criteria. Prior to starting the application process toward certification as a Diplomate, one may ask oneself (as I did on many occasions, prior to applying for certification): “What will certification as a Diplomate of the AAS do for my career?”

Your Career as a Diplomate

As I read an article written by a Diplomate of the AAS, I assign a certain, higher level of credibility to the authors, knowing what it means to earn this certification. Diplomates are the embodiment of pracademics in the environmental health profession. In addition to spotting their frequent articles in the *Journal*, Diplomates can be found throughout the ranks of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps; in leadership positions at NEHA (nearly 2/3 of the NEHA presidents over the past 20 years have been Diplomates of the AAS); various positions within federal agencies (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, Indian Health Service, etc.); holding management roles in public and environmental health departments across the U.S.; and as senior management in environmental health-related organizations, like Underwriters Lab-

oratories and NSF. Diplomates truly are leaders within the sanitarian profession.

Becoming a Diplomate

Diplomate of the AAS (DAAS)

In addition to the academic and professional experience needed in order to qualify for the Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) examination, currently licensed sanitarians must meet additional requirements to be selected as a DAAS. The criteria for selection, beyond those required for licensure as a sanitarian, are as follows:

1. Possession of a master's or higher degree in public health, the environmental health sciences, or in an area of scientific or administrative specialization bearing upon environmental management.
2. Dedication to protecting and promoting the health and quality of the life of mankind.
3. Legal registration as a registered sanitarian or environmental health specialist in a state or registered by NEHA.
4. At least seven years of acceptable experience in one or more of the various fields of environmental health, with at least five years of full-time work at the professional level, and two or more years above the staff level.
5. Possession of writing quality that is acceptable for publication in a national journal of environmental health, which can be documented by past publication or submission of an article that meets this standard.

Applications for certification as a Diplomate also need to be accompanied by a short personal biography and the names of at least three professional references (in addition to an applicant's supervisor) who would be willing to provide a letter of recommendation in support of the applicant. Once selected by the certification committee, Diplomates are able to use the DAAS in their title(s). As of the 2014 Annual Meeting of the AAS, 585 individuals have been selected as Diplomates of the AAS (American Academy of Sanitarians, 2014).

Diplomate Laureate of the AAS (DLAAS)

In order to become a DLAAS, potential candidates need to be a member of the academy for at least five years prior to application. They must also have 25 years of experience in the environmental health profession, with at least 15 as a credentialed environmental health

professional. Applicants must also meet at least five of the following eight requirements:

1. Possession of an advanced degree beyond the master's level.
2. Five or more technical publications in the field of environmental health.
3. Possession of one or more competency-based professional credentials in an environmental health and safety allied science.
4. Possession of one or more patents or copyrights related to public or environmental health.
5. Membership on a professional examination, licensing, or other environmental health credentialing board.
6. Membership on a national or international advisory board or standard committee in the environmental health sciences.
7. Hold or have held an elective office in an environmental health organization.
8. Recipient of a professional state or national environmental health award.

As of the 2014 Annual Meeting of the AAS, eight individuals have earned the Laureate level of certification by the Academy.

The Need for More Diplomates

As can be seen, Diplomates have historically held many prestigious positions within the environmental health profession. Although 585 individuals became certified over the past four decades, the number of applicants in recent years has significantly decreased. This is not due to a lack of qualified individuals, but may be due to a lack of aware individuals.

The academy is a group of leaders in the environmental health sciences whose goal is to continue elevating the environmental health profession through high academic standards and encouragement of the elevation of professional practices and technical knowledge of sanitarians across the country (and throughout the world).

In recent years, members of AAS have continued to make many significant advances in their long-standing tradition as leaders in the environmental health profession. Over the past few years, members of the academy have actively pursued mentoring opportunities for early career professionals, as well as current students, in the environmental health sciences (which will be discussed further in the next installment of this column). The academy has entered into an agreement to publish regu-

lar columns in the *Journal* that will discuss important topics and emerging trends in the environmental health profession. The academy recently updated its Web site in order to provide more information about the academy, its achievements, and its membership.

As AAS continues on its path toward leading the environmental health profession into the future, we need more help. If you meet the qualifications for membership, please consider applying for membership to the academy. Applications for membership can be obtained at <https://aaosi.wildapricot.org/Membership-Application>. 🐼

Corresponding Author: Felix I. Zemel, Principal, Pracademic Solutions, P.O. Box 920197, Needham, MA 02492.

E-mail: felix@pracademicsolutions.com.

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- Powitz, R. (2015). An introduction and history of the American Academy of Sanitarians. *Journal of Environmental Health*, 77(8), 34–35.
- Runkle, K. (2014). I am an environmental health pracademic (and so can you!). *Journal of Environmental Health*, 76(10), 42–43.

Did You Know?

NEHA and AAS are giving out four scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students at the NEHA 2015 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition in Orlando, Florida, this July. A total of \$5,000 will be awarded to the recipients.