




Are We a Profession?

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The Presenter

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- MPH degree from the University of Michigan
- 10 years with the Allegheny County Health Department as a Sanitarian, EH Supervisor and EH Administrator
- 42 years teaching Environmental Health at the University of Washington, School of Public Health
- Elected Diplomate in the American Academy of Sanitarians




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Question?

What is a profession?

➤ **Definition:** “a vocation or occupation requiring advanced education and training, and involving intellectual skills, as medicine, law, theology, engineering, teaching, etc.”

Source: New World Dictionary of the American Language, 2nd Edition, Simon & Schuster, 1980.




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Question?

What are the characteristics of a profession?

- Formal education
- Specialized knowledge and skills in a particular field
- Recognized credential



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Question?

Who or what are professionals?

➤ A person:

1. engaged in a specified activity as one's main paid occupation rather than as a pastime:
2. worthy of or appropriate to a professional person; competent, skillful, or assured:
3. relating to or belonging to a profession:

Source: Apple Dictionary, 2023.




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Question?

Perhaps the more pertinent question is . . .

Are we a **recognized** profession?




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Question?

What are the recognized professions?

- Physician
- Clergy
- Lawyer
- Engineer
- Nurse
- Etc.


} The so-called learned professions



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My Thesis!


We Sanitarians made a critical error 60-70 years ago when we forsook our professional title.



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Question?

But, do any of these professional titles tell us what the professional actually does?



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Engineer



Field of Practice: Engineering


Civil

Electrical

Chemical


Environmental Sanitary

Mechanical



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Lawyer



Field of Practice: Law

Prosecution

Defense

Criminal


Agency

Corporate

Contract


Civil

General



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Physician



Field of Practice: Medicine or Healthcare

General Practitioner

Podiatry

Medicine

Brain

Surgery

Thoracic

PAs & NPs


Hospital Nurses

Nursing

Private Nurse

School Nurse

Visiting Nurse




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Question?

What do all of these professions have in common?

- A single word that describes their profession that:
 - Most people recognize and understand (sort of);
 - **Identifies their area of specialized knowledge and skills.**
- Yet none of them tells us anything about where the person works or what that person does?




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Question?

Have you ever heard (or perhaps even said it yourself) that Environmental Health is the invisible profession?

- Yes?
- No?
- Why do you think that is?




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Question?

What else do all of these professions have in common?

- Recognition by the public
- Public understanding of their important role in society
- Recognition by the governments
- Respect
- Decent to good salaries




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Question?

Do we professionals working in the field of Environmental health enjoy all of these benefits?

- If not; why not?




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Question?

So, why are we not afforded the same recognition and prestige of the other professions?

- Could it be because we do not have a single term that embodies all of the professionals working in the field of Environmental Public Health?
 - Something that binds us together as working toward a common end; like medicine, engineering, law, etc...
- Why don't we have such a term?
- Wait!
- We do!, or at least we did!
- That single word is **Sanitarian**




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Sanitarians are Professionals


- Formal education
 - BS, MS, MPH, PhD, DrPH
- Specialized knowledge and skills in environmental and occupational health sciences
- Recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor
- Professional credentials
 - REHS/RS, CIH, CSP and others
 - Academic degree beyond a bachelors + recognition by AAS, APHA, NEHA, AIHA, Etc.



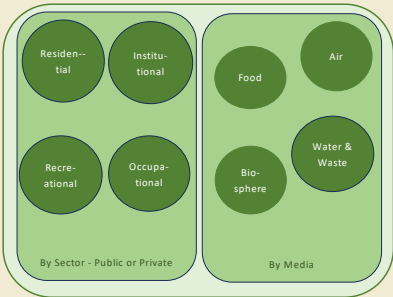
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Sanitarian



Field of Practice:
Environmental Health



By Sector - Public or Private

By Media

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Basic Argument

We Sanitarians made a critical error 60-70 years ago when we forsook our professional title in the interest of being:

- More modern?
- Better understood?
- Not looking backwards to yesterday's health risks?
- Charting a course into the future?
- **Instead we ended up charting a course into oblivion.**

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Current Situation

The field of Environmental Public Health is:

- Fragmented – scattered across multiple agencies and organizations
- Lacks a coherent organizing principle
- Is not well understood by the public
- Is not recognized as a profession by most policy makers
- Is not valued by the public
- Is not considered necessary for funding

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Solution?

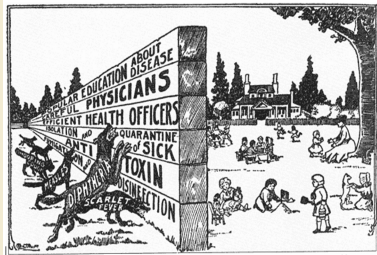
Each of these aspects of our practice could be addressed by embracing the title of **Sanitarian** and educating the public that:

- It does not mean someone who collects garbage
- It covers all environmental hazards to human health, including biological, chemical and physical risks
- It is dynamic and requires ever increasing knowledge and skills as the field of Environmental Health continues to expand.

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Are Sanitarians Important?

➤ You had better believe we are!



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The Professional Sanitarian

- Like physicians, nurses, lawyers and engineers, sanitarians work in both the public and private sectors
- Professional Sanitarians have a formal education, specialized knowledge and skills in the field of Environmental Public Health and a credential
- Sanitarians may work as:
 - EH Specialists
 - Industrial Hygienists
 - Food Sanitarian
 - EH Researchers
 - Etc., Etc.
 - EH Investigators
 - Corporate Safety Officers
 - Environmental Protection Specialists
 - PCO or PMP
 - EH Officers
 - EH Scientists

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My Point Is . . .

It doesn't matter:

- what a person's job title may be.
- where the person may work.
- if some entity pays their salary or they hang out a shingle in private practice.

What matters is that they assess and control environmental risks to human health and well-being.

So, wherever they work, they are doing the work of a **Sanitarian!**



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Discussion Counter Arguments



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Counter Arguments

- Time for some push back . . .
- Let's see if I have captured them



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Common Counter Arguments

Sanitarian is an old term; so what?

- Medicine dates back at least 3,000 years
- As do law and the roots of engineering
- It sounds so old fashioned
- Why is that?
- Perhaps because we have not embraced it?
- The term has the same root as sanitation



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Perhaps a little history may help!

- Yes, it comes from "sanitas", Latin for **health**
- And yes, the sanitarian was born out of the sanitary reform movement.
 - But, consider the science of the time
 - The microscope was newly invented allowing the scientific community for the first time to actually detect micro-biological organisms, so naturally early efforts were devoted to biological risks.
 - But in the 20th century we codeloped ways to identify and measure chemical and physical risks to human health
 - And more advancements are being added every year.



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Perhaps a little history may help!

For the Romans, *sanitas* embodied the state of complete physical, mental and social well being.

Sound familiar?
And if *sanitas* is the root for sanitation, it is also the root for **sane!**

Also consider, **economics** and **ecology** also have the same Greek root "ecos" meaning **house**.

➤ Do people confuse an economist with an ecologist?



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Common Counter Arguments Continued

But, it sounds “icky”

- So did some of the others.
 - The term “physician” comes from Europe in the middle ages and was applied to a person who prescribed “a phycis”, i.e., a laxative!
 - And, nursing comes from the term “wet nurse”, i.e., a lactating woman.
- Is the tie to the sanitary reform movement so onerous in comparison?
- What we perhaps should be stressing is that as the environmental risks to human health and well-being keep expanding so does the range of responsibilities of the sanitarian



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Thank you!

- Some final thoughts,
- that might help if you are willing to embrace the term Sanitarian as our professional identity.



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Terms Used

- **Profession:** Sanitarian
- **Field of Practice:** Environmental Public Health
- **Specialized Knowledge and Skills:** Assessing and managing environmental risks to human life, health, safety and well-being from biological, chemical or physical agents.
- **Specialty Areas:** Air Quality, Food Protection, Hazardous Materials, Housing, Occupational Health & Safety, Recreational Areas & Facilities, Solid Wastes, Wastewater, Water Quality, Zoonotic and Vector-borne Disease Control, among others.
- **Short definition:** Environmental Health is study of environmental factors and conditions that impact human health and well being, and the development and implementation of control strategies and programs.



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Elevator Speech

Sanitarians are the professionals who use their specialized knowledge and skills to assess and control environmental risks to human health and well-being.



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Thank You!

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