



The Walter F. Snyder Award for 2001

Presented to

Robert W. Powitz, Ph.D.

Thirty-four years ago, Dr. Robert W. Powitz began an adventure in environmental health that would take him from industrial hygienist in the State of New Jersey to the distinguished title of "one of the nation's most prominent environmental health professionals."

Advancing rapidly from hygienist to Senior Sanitarian, Powitz was given the task of forming a full-time health department for the Borough of Ringwood, New Jersey. This licensed health officer, the first in Ringwood Borough, took no time in implementing a health program that soon eradicated endemic Ascariasis among infants and children of the indigenous Ramapo Mountain People. Having established a full-service municipal health department in Ringwood, his advanced education became the next priority.

Dr. Powitz had earned his Bachelor of Science Agriculture degree from the University of Georgia in 1964. He was accepted at the University of Minnesota, School of Public Health as a graduate student. He completed his Masters of Public and Environmental Health in 1974 and his Ph.D. in Environmental Health in 1978 while supporting minors in epidemiology and microbiology.

As a post-doctoral research associate with the National Environmental Health Association, in 1978, Dr. Powitz was instrumental in redefining the Sanitarian profession, the first revision since its formal recognition in 1936. Multiple states reclassified the criteria for the Sanitarian profession; and, Powitz became an advocate in the growth and preservation of the Sanitarian profession.

In 1979, Dr. Powitz accepted an appointment as staff epidemiologist at Mercy Hospital in Detroit, Michigan. Once again, he excelled in his endeavor by identifying multiple causalities of post-Cesarean Section nosocomial

infections. Implementing procedural changes in overall sanitation reduced the infection rate to less than three percent. Thus, the entire hospital chain adapted his modifications.

Dr. Powitz' tenure at Mercy Hospital was short lived as he was successfully recruited by Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan to establish an Environmental Health and Safety Office for the University. Not only did he establish this office, he served as its Director and biological safety officer for twelve years.

During his tenure, he orchestrated the implementation of a hazardous waste brokerage including a solvent recovery and reagent-recycling program. In a five-year span more than 54 tons of hazardous waste materials were processed leading to the establishment of hazardous waste collection sites throughout the State of Michigan.

As 'watchdog' for the profession of the Sanitarian, still at Wayne State, Dr. Powitz:

- co-founded and taught the Graduate Certificate and Masters degree programs in Hazardous Materials Management for eight years.
- served as a principal investigator for professional credentialing in environmental management.
- led by example in professional credentialing, he amassed 23 certifications and 6 licenses in 7 states and 13 national associations and/or boards.
- conducted tutorials, training sessions and conferences for the Michigan pest control industry.

In 1987, Dr. Powitz began a new career as a Forensic Sanitarian introducing the art of Forensic environmental health and safety to the sanitarian profession. These professionals now serve as expert witnesses in public health litigation support activities. "In so doing, the

State of Michigan Department of Commerce reluctantly, albeit formally recognized the Sanitarian as a professional entity," notes a fellow consultant. He adds, "Bob was the first to establish a Professional Corporation (P.C.) based on the Michigan Sanitarian Registration."

In 1992, the U.S. Department of Agriculture persuaded Dr. Powitz to join its Agriculture Research Service Plum Island Animal Disease Center in Greenport, New York. As Director, Biological Safety and Environment, he rewrote the USDA Biological Safety Manual using scientifically sound protocols and standards.

Powitz subsequently entered private practice as a consultant specializing in Institutional Environmental Health, particularly related to the often-neglected field of correctional facilities.

In addition to his private practice (R.W. Powitz & Associates, P.C.), Powitz currently serves as part-time health director for the Town of Westbrook, Connecticut.

Dr. Powitz has published numerous articles, papers and reports, and has made as many invited presentations and lectures. Three widely recognized publications in his dossier include:

- Current Topics, a quarterly magazine distributed throughout the United States and Canada on school safety and health issues.
- Tools for Environmental Health, a regular column in the Journal of Environmental Health introducing new technologies and innovative methods for calibration and validation of field instrumentation.
- The Corrections Advisor, a featured column in Corrections Managers' Report, devoted entirely to current issues in environmental health and safety of incarcerated persons.

"Technically, Bob is one of the finest environmental health professionals, advocates and communicators I have met in my 32-year academic, private and government career(s). His leadership qualities have been an asset to all who have needed his assistance... [he is] a constant source of encouragement to his colleagues, students and 'clients,'" writes a fellow environmental health professional.

His dedication has brought him well-earned recognition for his work. His awards include: Laureate Diplomate #001 American Academy of Sanitarians (AAS); Davis Calvin Wagner Award, AAS; President's Award, Academy of Certified Hazardous Materials Manager (ACHMM) and President's Award CHMM-Michigan.

Dr. Powitz has an overwhelming desire to improve the practice of public health for his constituents and the public in general. Whether sharing institutional environmental health expertise, serving on the NSF Council of Public Health Consultants, participating in a NEHA workshop or doing volunteer work for a Federal agency, Powitz excels.

A fellow diplomat says it well, "Powitz is the quintessential sanitarian, combining extensive scientific background with his great enthusiasm and practical experience in the field. His no nonsense (tell it like it is) approach to problem solving combined with an ever present sense of humor has earned him a respected reputation as one of the nation's most prominent environmental health professionals."

He truly fulfills the qualifications of an individual committed to environmental health as subscribed by the award's namesake. NSF International and the National Environmental Health Association take great pleasure in awarding to Dr. Robert W. Powitz the 2001 Walter F. Snyder Award for Achievement in Attaining Environmental Quality.

Past Recipients of the Walter F. Snyder Award

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Ray B. Watts
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Charles H. Gilham
Emily T. Chanlett

John R. Bagby, Jr.
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William G. Walter
Albert H. Brunwasser
George A. Kupfer
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