

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS ROBERT K. HAM**

Professor Robert “Bob” Ham, 74, passed away February 24, 2012. Born in Rochester, Minnesota, Bob earned a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering from the University of Minnesota and a master’s degree in chemical engineering, along with a PhD in civil and sanitary engineering, from the University of Washington. Before entering graduate studies, he worked four years for the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (now 3M) in Saint Paul. His early research interest focused on physical changes observed during chemical coagulation.

Joining the Department of Civil (and Environmental) Engineering in 1967 as an assistant professor, Dr. Ham began a distinguished career that extended over 30 years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Increasing nationwide public and academic interest in finding better approaches to the uncontrolled disposal of solid waste was coincidental with his arrival at the university. Professor Ham applied his engineering and chemistry knowledge in innovative ways to understand better this emerging environmental engineering specialization. Pursuing lines of research, he proved that complex biological processes controlled how solid waste changed properties when placed in dumps and the newly developed sanitary landfills. His work with test cells, moisture movement, leachate management, methane generation, and processing solid waste continue to guide the design and operation of new landfills and associated processing facilities.

Professor Ham mentored hundreds of engineering students who continue to honor his legacy by leading efforts to implement solid waste disposal practices that provide improved protection of the environment and human health. Results from his research influenced key elements of federal and state regulations for improving solid waste management practices. His undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral students are in leadership positions in agencies, consulting firms, waste management companies, and universities throughout the U.S. and internationally. Shunning research fads, Professor Ham taught his students to assess critically each situation, using observation and data in an effort to achieve better engineering designs. He also regularly participated in Department of Engineering Professional Development continuing education programs where he directly impacted current practice. With an extensive record of publications and frequent participation in international forums, including the International Solid Waste Association Working Group, his work continues to influence solid waste disposal practices worldwide. Professor Ham was a founding editorial board member of the Journal of Waste Management and Research and served on several other waste related journal boards. He held several leadership positions at the Sardinia Italy Sanitary Landfill Conference. In 2003, he received a lifetime achievement award in recognition of his professional achievements. This is the highest award of recognition at the biennial conference, which has an attendance of over 900 people.

After retirement from the university Bob became active in local politics, being elected to the West Point Town Board. With his leadership, the town adopted a comprehensive land-use plan, ensuring limited development and preserving the community’s rural character.

Bob’s diverse interests included music, bicycling, motorcycling, and spending time with his family. Throughout his life, Bob’s intellectual curiosity inspired him to travel. He visited Europe for the first time in 1954 and returned around 35 times. He also rode his motorcycle all over the United States, including to Alaska and back.

Joyce Brereton, Professor Ham’s wife, died in 2011. Three children and four grandchildren survive him.

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Professor Ham, through his research and teaching, established himself as an engineering leader. He provided not only his students, but also the users of his discoveries, with the knowledge and skills to extend his solid waste management innovations for protecting the environment and human health for many years into the future.

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