

Certification Comes of Age

After 50 Years, the CCM Program Is Just Getting Started

BY SEAN POTTER

For fifty years, the American Meteorological Society (AMS) has met the needs of those requiring professional weather- and climate-related services through its Certified Consulting Meteorologist (CCM) Program. Over the years, the program has become known for certifying meteorologists with high standards of knowledge, experience, and professional character. But despite the value of the services CCMs provide, growth in the program has been slow, and the AMS is now considering how to emphasize the importance of the designation as it prepares to celebrate the program's fiftieth anniversary.

The Early Days

The AMS CCM program dates back to 1956 when, in response to the growth of private weather-related businesses following World War II, the now-defunct AMS Committee on Industrial Meteorology recommended to the AMS Council that the society create and administer a professional certification program. The council approved the recommendation and established a Board of Certified Consulting Meteorologists, whose initial six members were the first to receive the CCM designation. The board published its first announcement for applications to the program in the November 1957 *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* and subsequently awarded its first CCM designation under the new

program to Loren Crow, a pioneer in private-sector industrial meteorology.

Becoming a CCM

The AMS defines meteorological consulting as "providing services individually to many on a fee basis, or serving a company, government agency, or academic institution where such work comprises part or all of the meteorologist's functions." Some of the areas in which CCMs specialize include applied meteorology, air pollution, regulatory permits and applications, forensic meteorology, forecasting and weather prediction, and training and education. Applicants to the CCM program must have a minimum of five years of professional experience as

a meteorologist and be supported by three professional references, at least one of whom should be a CCM. During the certification process, they must pass a written exam that consists of several essay questions designed to gauge the applicant's knowledge of general meteorology and to delve deeper into a particular area of specialty. Applicants also must submit a technical paper or report representing their professional work. A committee consisting of four members of the CCM board and the current board chair reviews the exam and report.

Applicants who successfully pass this phase of the application process advance to the final phase: an oral review before members of the CCM board, who question the applicant in detail regarding his exam answers

services to select consultants or employees with greater confidence in the quality and reliability of the products or services they will receive." It also provides incentive for meteorologists to continue their professional development after they complete their formal academic training.

To keep pace with changes in the field, the AMS Council in 2004 approved a plan to implement mandatory continuing professional development for all active CCMs. The goal of the new requirement is to help ensure that CCMs continue the training and development that were necessary for them to obtain their original certification. CCMs must accrue Professional Development Score (PDS) points through activities such as presenting a paper or a



and technical report. The oral review also involves discussions of hypothetical consulting situations designed to evaluate applicants' professional ethics. This might involve questions on a topic outside of an applicant's field of specialty. The questions are designed in part to show potential CCMs that while it might be tempting to take on any work that comes along, the AMS expects professional CCMs to realize the limits of their expertise and know when to refer customers to other, more qualified colleagues.

Quality Control

From a customer's standpoint, the value of certification is that it shows a CCM's dedication to the profession and holds the meteorologist to certain guidelines, said Matt Parker, who chairs the AMS Board on Enterprise Communications and has been a CCM since 1997. "In other words, if I were to make a mistake, be negligent, or do something that was not right in the customer's eyes, the customer has a recourse." According to the AMS, the CCM certification "enables users of meteorological

poster at a technical conference, completing a professionally related formal training activity, or simply being actively employed in the profession. Every five years, CCMs must ensure their active standing in the program by submitting the points and related activities in an electronic portfolio for evaluation.

Although the new requirements were initially met with resistance by some members of the CCM community, many CCMs seem to embrace the opportunity for professional development. "I think it's a good idea, like all certifications," said Parker. "In the medical profession, you would expect professionals that are working on you for your health to be involved in training and professional development and I don't see why meteorologists should be any different."

A Blip on the Radar

But despite the changes to the program in recent years, growth has been slow. Since the program was established 50 years ago, only 631 individuals have received the CCM designation, and only

about 350 of the awardees are currently active. Among those who hold the CCM designation there is concern because the number of active members represents a small percentage of the AMS's more than 12,000 members. "I'm a little bit surprised that more people are not taking advantage of [the program]," said Bill Haggard, who became a CCM shortly after leaving the federal government in 1975. "I think that perhaps some of them are afraid of the effort that's involved in getting it and I think they should be encouraged to go ahead because it is a very straightforward program."

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Parker admitted that more work needs to be done to promote the designation among meteorologists. "I don't think the understanding of the program within our profession is as good as it should be, and it's holding the program back," he said. Jill Hasling, who has been a CCM since 1992 and currently sits on the CCM board, agrees. "I hope that we get across to everyone that every meteorologist, no matter whether [they are] working in the academic, public, or private sector, should become a CCM as part of their professional development." Hasling, who directs the non-profit Weather Research Center in Houston, Texas, is personally trying to recruit more women and minorities into the program. "I've seen more women coming into the field of meteorology and I'd like to see them coming into the private sector."

In addition to private sector meteorologists, Haggard stresses the importance of certification for government employees. "Having been a government employee up until [1975], there seemed to be no need for [professional certification] in the government service," he recalls. "But I realize that many of the government employees today probably should apply for being CCMs."

2007: The Year of the CCM

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the CCM program, the AMS is planning special events to help promote the program at its annual meeting in January in San Antonio, Texas. "We will have a forum and hopefully some outreach programs," said Hasling, who chairs the newly created CCM Marketing and Public Relations Committee. The committee's focus is to raise awareness of the program in hopes of increasing the number of applicants. "We're trying to recruit more CCMs during our 50th year," Hasling said. In addition to presentations about their experiences by active CCMs, the forum will include a panel discussion on the changing roles of CCMs. The forum will be followed by a special poster session that will give current CCMs an opportunity to showcase the kinds of work they do and discuss the importance of certification in their own careers.

To further promote the program and its anniversary, the AMS has created a new brochure, titled "Year of the CCM," which is available on the organization's website. "The brochure includes information on the history of the program, defines what a CCM is, and provides information on requirements for certification," said Kelly Savoie, manager of marketing and special programs for the AMS. According to Savoie, the AMS has also included an information table at its 2006 specialty conferences and will include one at the upcoming annual meeting in San Antonio. Staffed by volunteer CCMs, the table includes applications, procedures, brochures, and additional information on the program.

All of these activities are being done in an effort to increase awareness of the program and recruit new applicants. Haggard, who at age 85 is one of the more senior members of the CCM community, said growth in the CCM program should reflect growth in the field of meteorology in general. "I'd like to see the numbers each year double or triple," he said, "because meteorology is such an expanding field that there are so many people who are competent who ought to have the endorsement of their professional society." W

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