

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC)

AGENCY: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

ACTION: Notice of Conference and Availability of Standards

SUMMARY: The Environmental Protection Agency will hold a conference on national environmental laboratory accreditation, to discuss all aspects of accreditation for laboratories performing analyses to demonstrate compliance with EPA regulations. The conference is open to the public. The constitution and the draft standards are being published to allow time for review before the conference.

DATES: The conference will be held on February 14-16, 1995. All meeting will convene at 9:00 am and adjourn at 5:00 pm, except Thursday February 16 when the meeting will adjourn at 3:00 pm.

ADDRESS: The meeting will be held at the Hyatt Regency, 2799 Jefferson Davis Highway, Arlington, VA 22202.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Conference arrangements are being coordinated by TLI Systems. For information on registration, hotel rates, transportation, and reservations call Dan Dozier of TLI Systems at 301/718-2270 to receive a brochure. If you have technical questions regarding the conference program please contact one of the following individuals: Jeanne Hankins Mourrain; EPA; Office of Research and Development; Atmospheric Research and Exposure Assessment Laboratory (MD-77B); Research Triangle Park, NC 27711; telephone 919/541-1120; fax 919/541-7953, or Gary Bennett; EPA Region IV; Environmental Services Division; Athens, GA 30605-2720; telephone 706/546-3287; fax

706/546-3375 or Kenneth Jackson, Marge Prevost, and Matt Caruso; State of New York; Department of Health; PO Box 509; Albany, NY 12201-0509; telephone 518/474-8519; fax 518/474-6184.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Laboratories, the regulated community, laboratory clients and the regulatory agencies have experienced difficulty under the current system of laboratory accreditation. In response to complaints received in 1990, EPA has been working in a cooperative venture with the states and the public to develop a system which would surmount many of the existing problems.

In 1991 The Committee on National Accreditation of Environmental Laboratories (CNAEL) was chartered at the request of EPA's Deputy Administrator. The CNAEL was charged with determining the need and advisability of a national environmental laboratory accreditation program, alternatives to such a program, and the role of EPA in any program. CNAEL was composed of members from the laboratory and regulated industry communities, academia, other federal agencies, the states, public environmental interest groups, and private accrediting bodies.

CNAEL identified and prioritized numerous issues which were of concern to each of the affected parties and reached agreement on an overall problem statement: to achieve data of needed quality in a cost effective manner. Fifteen alternative solutions were proposed and evaluated in relation to the problem statement. Multiple options for operation of a program were identified and ranked. In addition, the scope of a program was defined in terms of environmental regulations, which laboratories should be included, and which activities/tests would be included. Finally CNAEL identified the elements of a national environmental

laboratory accreditation program for purposes of clarity. At the conclusion of its deliberations CNAEL recommended that a national program for accreditation of environmental laboratories, which includes the key elements of on-site audits, performance evaluation testing, and data audits, be implemented by enlisting states and/or third parties to perform the accrediting function with oversight of the accrediting bodies by a federal agency.

In order to act upon the recommendations of CNAEL, EPA convened the State/EPA Focus Group, which is composed of ten states (California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, South Carolina, Texas) and eight EPA Offices (Office of Air and Radiation, Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances, Office of Research and Development, Office of Regional Operations and State/Local Relations, Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, Office of Water, Region 4). The Focus Group has developed a set of draft standards based on the ISO 25 Guidelines, as proposed by CNAEL, and a constitution for operation of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC). This set of standards and the constitution will form the basis for the discussions at the NELAC as discussed below. The NELAC is a key step in implementing the solution proposed by CNAEL and has the potential to influence the entire environmental laboratory community. States and federal agencies will function as the decision making (voting) members of the conference. The proposed process is to modify and refine the set of draft standards. Additions and modifications are expected to be made during the NELAC committee meetings where the comments and suggestions of all of sectors of the laboratory community will be solicited to ensure that the standards are responsive to the needs of the public, are practical

to implement, are scientifically sound, and are as cost efficient as possible. For those unable to participate directly in the NELAC, written comments can be submitted to Jeanne Mourrain.

Once agreement is reached on the standards the states may voluntarily adopt the standards and would have responsibility for ensuring conformance with the standards. Any laboratory which performs analyses to demonstrate compliance with federal environmental regulations in a participating state would be required to be accredited under the state regulations and would be deemed accredited in all other participating states. EPA would provide oversight of state accreditation programs and inspections of state and federal laboratories. In most cases the states would accredit laboratories only within their own state. However, laboratories located in states which do not participate in the national program could seek accreditation from another state which has adopted the national standards.

The goal of the program is to accredit all laboratories which perform environmental analyses for compliance with regulations. The information and status of these laboratories would be readily available to regulators, clients, and the general public. Reciprocity would be easily obtained and would be granted on a state-by-state basis. Reciprocity would eliminate duplicate on-site inspections and performance evaluation sample testing. Some states may have supplemental requirements required by state law which exceed the national standards, e.g. some states have regulated additional compounds for drinking water, which might require analysis of additional performance evaluation samples.

A fully operational national environmental laboratory accreditation program would enable a laboratory to conduct business in any of the states or territories, with minimal disruption of operations and lower costs. International acceptance of national accreditation

should be greatly facilitated. The capability of laboratories for all types of environmental analyses would be included in the scope of a national program, enabling clients of laboratories to readily identify the laboratories which could perform the needed analyses.

The NELAC will provide the opportunity for the entire laboratory community to voice their concerns, provide advice based on their professional experience and effect positive changes in the current accreditation process. Among those who are encouraged to attend are state and federal accrediting and laboratory agencies, private sector laboratories, the regulated industry, environmental interest groups, accrediting bodies, academia, and the general public.

Ramona Trovato, Director

Water Enforcement Division

Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance