

How Does Using an Accredited Laboratory Benefit Government and Regulators?

HOW DOES USING AN ACCREDITED LABORATORY BENEFIT GOVERNMENT AND REGULATORS?

Government bodies and regulators are constantly called upon to make decisions related to:

- protecting the health and welfare of consumers and the public
- protecting the environment
- developing new regulations and requirements
- measuring compliance with regulatory and legal requirements
- allocating resources, both technical and financial

Government bodies and regulators must have confidence in the data generated by laboratories in order to make these decisions. Using an accredited laboratory can help establish and assure this confidence.

If a laboratory is accredited by a reputable accreditation body, it means that the laboratory has achieved a prescribed level of technical competence to perform specific types of testing, measurement and calibration activities. The result is assurance that the laboratory is capable of producing data that are accurate, traceable and reproducible – critical components in governmental decision-making.

Using an accredited laboratory benefits government and regulators by:

- increasing confidence in data that are used to establish baselines for key analyses and decisions
- reducing uncertainties associated with decisions that affect the protection of human health and the environment
- increasing public confidence, because accreditation is a recognisable mark of approval
- eliminating redundant reviews and improving the efficiency of the assessment process (which may reduce costs)

Using an accredited laboratory also increases confidence that:

- decisions regarding multiple facilities are based on comparable data
- purchases received from suppliers are safe and reliable
- costs associated with laboratory problems, including re-testing, re-sampling, and lost time are minimised
- false positives and negatives, which can directly affect compliance with regulations, are minimised



Using accredited laboratories also facilitates trade and economic growth. The accreditation process relies on a uniform approach to determining laboratory competence – an approach that has been accepted and implemented across many borders. Because of internationally accepted testing and measurement practices,

data generated by an accredited laboratory may lead to the more ready acceptance of exported goods in overseas markets. This reduces costs and eases exports and imports, as it reduces or eliminates the need for retesting in another country.

HOW DOES LABORATORY ACCREDITATION WORK?

Throughout the world, many countries rely on a process called Laboratory Accreditation to determine the technical competence of their laboratories. The laboratory accreditation process is generally provided by one accreditation body within a country. Some developing economies, without established accreditation bodies, can seek to have their laboratories accredited by an established system in another country. To find out if your country has a laboratory accreditation body, contact your national standards body or your ministry for industry or technology. If you have Internet access, visit the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) website at www.ilac.org and use the posted directory of laboratory accreditation bodies. This website also includes links to directories of accredited laboratories in certain countries.

How does laboratory accreditation differ from ISO 9001 certification? ISO 9001 certification demonstrates that a laboratory has an established quality management system, but it does not address technical competence. Laboratory accreditation takes the next step, using criteria and procedures specifically developed to determine technical competence. Here's how accreditation works. Specialist technical assessors conduct a thorough evaluation of laboratory practices and equipment that impact the production of test or calibration data. The evaluation criteria are based on the international standards ISO/IEC 17025, or ISO 15189 for medical laboratories, standards that are used to evaluate laboratories throughout the world.



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Accredited laboratories are regularly re-examined to ensure that they maintain high standards of technical expertise. Government representatives, at their option, can take part in on-going assessments. Laboratories may also be required to participate in regular proficiency testing programs as an on-going demonstration of their competence.

HOW DO I FIND AN ACCREDITED LABORATORY?

Accredited laboratories usually include an accreditation symbol or endorsement on their test or calibration reports. You should request a list of test, calibration, or measurement procedures for which the laboratory is accredited. This is normally specified in a laboratory's Scope of Accreditation, provided by the laboratory upon request.

Accreditation bodies in many countries publish lists or directories of the laboratories they have accredited, which often include laboratory contacts and individual testing capabilities. An accreditation body may assist you by identifying accredited laboratories that can perform the tests or calibrations you require.

If you have Internet access, visit the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) website at www.ilac.org and use the posted directory of laboratory accreditation bodies. This website also includes links to directories of accredited laboratories in certain countries.

WHAT FACTORS ARE IMPORTANT WHEN CHOOSING A LABORATORY?

When selecting a testing, calibration or measurement laboratory, be sure it can supply you with accurate and reliable results. The technical competence of a laboratory depends on a number of factors, including:

- Qualifications, training and experience of the staff
- Correct equipment – properly calibrated and maintained
- Adequate quality assurance procedures
- Proper sampling practices
- Appropriate and valid testing procedures and methods
- Traceability of measurements to national standards
- Accurate recording and reporting procedures
- Suitable testing facilities

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

ILAC is the peak international authority on laboratory accreditation, with a membership consisting of accreditation bodies and affiliated organisations throughout the world. It is involved with the development of laboratory accreditation practices and procedures, the promotion of laboratory accreditation as a trade facilitation tool, the assistance of developing accreditation systems, and the recognition of competent test and calibration facilities around the globe. ILAC actively cooperates with other relevant international bodies in pursuing these aims.

ILAC also publishes a range of literature on topics covering accreditation, testing, trade facilitation and related subjects. Its internet site at www.ilac.org can provide a range of information on laboratory accreditation, as well as the location of its members world-wide. A brochure entitled *What Is ILAC?* provides detailed information on ILAC and its activities, and is available on request.

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