



Harnessing the Challenges in Reinventing the California Laboratory Accreditation Program – *The Expert Panel Perspective*

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING CONFERENCE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Background
- ▶ Executive Summary
- ▶ Programmatic Problems
- ▶ Recommendations
- ▶ Timetable
- ▶ Wrap-up



<http://www.sccwrp.org/ELAP>



BACKGROUND

- ▶ Expert Review Panel established to perform a programmatic review of the California (CA) Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP)
- ▶ Stakeholder Advisory Committee aided in the Expert Review Panel's selection, charge, and meeting agendas
- ▶ Panel Process:
 - ▶ Four Face-to-Face Meetings over Two-years
 - ▶ Two Reports:
 - ▶ Findings and Recommendations – Year One Report
 - ▶ Evaluation of ELAP to Recommendations – Year Two Report



CHARGE QUESTIONS

1. What should State's role be in the accreditation process?
2. How can CA accreditation standards be improved?
3. What should CA's approach be to recognition of other accreditation programs?
4. How can CA's laboratory inspection program be more robust?
5. How can CA improve its proficiency testing program?
6. How can CA improve its process for responding to concerns?
7. How should CA plan for future needs?
8. Which program improvements are most urgent?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ California's Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP) is in trouble
- ▶ Credibility – The quality of being trusted and believed in
- ▶ California ELAP lacks credibility with:
 - ▶ Clients,
 - ▶ Laboratories, and
 - ▶ Other states





PROGRAMMATIC DEFICIENCIES

- ▶ No management system
- ▶ No training program or accountability for staff
- ▶ Out-of-date analytical methods
- ▶ No stakeholder communication



RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Establish a management system
- ▶ Adopt accreditation standards
- ▶ Ensure use of relevant methods
- ▶ Expand resources
- ▶ Enhance communication

MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- ▶ Programmatic Problem

- ▶ Lack of a robust, comprehensive internal management system is at the root of several chronic problems
- ▶ There are no employee expectations, no performance metrics, no defined responsibilities

- ▶ Recommendation

- ▶ Adopt a widely respected standard and establish a management structure that contains at a minimum
 - ▶ Operational processes to carry out ELAP's functions
 - ▶ Internal reviews to assess performance
- ▶ Numerous benefits with well defined roles, processes, transparency, consistency, and support tools among others

LABORATORY ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

- ▶ Programmatic Problem
 - ▶ Lack rigor to verify competency of laboratories
 - ▶ Insufficient staff qualifications to objectively assess all methods
 - ▶ Lack comprehensive approach to quality management
- ▶ Recommended options
 - ▶ Create ELAP's own State-specific standard
 - ▶ Modify and adopt an existing standard
 - ▶ Adopt an existing standard



RELEVANT ANALYTICAL METHODS

- ▶ Programmatic Problem
 - ▶ The list of analytical methods for which ELAP accredits is outdated
- ▶ Recommendation
 - ▶ Ideal solution – Eliminate references to specific analytical methods in regulations
 - ▶ Short-term solution – Subsections of Title 22 enable ELAP to use alternate methods as ELAP deems appropriate
 - ▶ Fall-back solution – Update methods ASAP, if prescriptive language cannot be removed or modified

RESOURCES

- ▶ Programmatic Problem
 - ▶ Staff are unqualified to meet the demands of the program and inadequate fees have made the program unsustainable
- ▶ Recommendations
 - ▶ Invest in staff development including enhanced training, established performance criteria, and electronic support tools
 - ▶ Revise fee structure
 - ▶ Incorporate use of expanded resources to accept accreditation by other State programs and allowing laboratories to directly contract with third-party assessors to assess them



COMMUNICATION

- ▶ Programmatic Problem
 - ▶ ELAP has not been effectively serving its clients because of poor communication and outreach
- ▶ Recommendation
 - ▶ Develop a communication plan
 - ▶ Reinvigorate the Environmental Laboratory Technical Advisory Committee (ELTAC)
 - ▶ Regular interaction with program clients

TIMETABLE

- ▶ Complete within 6 months or less:
 - ▶ Establish a management system for ELAP based on ISO/IEC 17011 (4.1)
 - ▶ Implement a structured system for communication with stakeholders, including communications training for staff (4.3)
 - ▶ Reinvigorate the ELTAC (4.3.1)
 - ▶ Working with ELTAC, revise method checklists so that all assessors are using the same version (4.3.2)
 - ▶ Provide training on new ELAP standards following completion of Recommendation 4.2 (4.3.3)
 - ▶ Temporarily accept accreditation from other recognized accreditation bodies (4.4)

TIMETABLE (continued)

- ▶ Complete within one year:
 - ▶ Adopt accreditation standards for laboratories (4.2)
 - ▶ Establish a training and evaluation program for ELAP's assessors (4.2.1)
 - ▶ Reduce the assessor backlog by developing a program that utilizes third-party assessors (4.2.2)
 - ▶ Establish procedures for enforcement actions (4.5)
 - ▶ Ensure accreditation is based on current and relevant analytical methods (4.6)
 - ▶ Further reduce assessor backlog by (a) using commercial software for managing PT data and (b) investigating mechanisms for remote laboratory assessments (4.7)
 - ▶ Revise ELAP fee structure (4.8)

TIMETABLE (continued)

- ▶ Complete within two years:
 - ▶ Establish an internal ELAP auditing process (4.1.1)
 - ▶ Provide training on new ELAP standards following completion of Recommendation 4.2 (4.3.3)
 - ▶ Ensure accreditation is based on current and relevant analytical methods (4.6)

- ▶ Complete within three years:
 - ▶ Assess whether the short-term solution of recognizing laboratory accreditation from other programs to reduce backlog should be extended as a permanent program feature (4.4.1)



SUMMARY

- ▶ ELAP was not achieving its mission, but ELAP's new management team understand need for comprehensive overhaul to program
- ▶ State should support ELAP's efforts and hold ELAP accountable
- ▶ Panel believes ELAP can:
 - ▶ Regain credibility
 - ▶ Achieve financial sustainability
 - ▶ Operate accreditation process State and stakeholders support
 - ▶ Reliably ensure environmental and public health data used are of known and documented quality

QUESTIONS???



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