

Frequently Asked Questions



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1 What is the process for using a TPA?

See our snazzy **Roadmap to Accreditation: Overview of Third-Party Assessment Process** graphic for details.

2 Who schedules the assessment?

The lab contacts the TPA and works with them to determine a convenient assessment date.

3 When should the assessment take place?

ELAP recommends initiating an assessment *at least* 6 months before you need to have it fully complete. However, a laboratory can schedule an assessment whenever is most convenient, provided it is either:

- Within one year preceding the submittal of an amendment or initial application, OR
- During the two-year accreditation window of your certificate for renewal applications

4 What are the TPA's responsibilities?

They will conduct the laboratory's on-site assessment, including all necessary pre- and post-assessment activities, for any lab utilizing a TPA. This includes planning, scheduling, assembly of a qualified assessment team, document review, traveling to and from your location, the actual on-site assessment, issuance of the On-Site Assessment Report, and Corrective Action Plan review.

5 What are the lab's responsibilities?

The laboratory is responsible for determining if it needs or wants to use a TPA, selecting an approved TPA for the assessment, contacting the TPA to schedule, fulfilling documentation requests, participating in the on-site assessment, and completing the on-site assessment (including the Corrective Action Plan) before you submit your application for accreditation in accordance with required timelines.

On May 5, 2020, the **California State Water Resources Control Board** adopted comprehensive regulations for the Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP) to modernize the program and elevate data quality for California communities. Help is on the way! A **Roadmap to ELAP Accreditation** will include a series of tools and guidance to help laboratories successfully navigate the path to compliance.

Questions, comments, ideas, or suggestions? Send a note to elapca_comments@waterboards.ca.gov.



Frequently Asked Questions



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6 What auditing standards will TPAs use during the three-year transition period before TNI is required?

The TPAs can audit to either the 2016 TNI Standard, or to the requirements of the adopted regulations (which include a few new quality assurance requirements). A checklist for the 2016 TNI Standard is available online at www.nelac-institute.org and ELAP will provide a checklist to TPAs and the labs for the California regulations to be used during the transition period.

7 Will ELAP review the On-site Assessment Report and/or Corrective Action Plan before the TPA sends it to the lab?

No – this process occurs between the TPA and lab. ELAP reviews the OSAR and CAP during review of the laboratory's application and prior to granting accreditation.

8 Can I disagree with a finding from a TPA?

Yes, at several separate points in the process. First, a laboratory can dispute a finding with their assessor during the assessment and corrective action processes (TPAs are required to have formal processes to do so). Secondly, a laboratory can contact TNI and file a Request for Standards interpretation if the dispute involves the TNI Standard requirements. If those avenues are not sufficient, a laboratory can file a dispute with ELAP at the time of application if it does not agree with the final report from the TPA. ELAP will review the dispute and make a determination. Lastly, a laboratory can petition any final decision made by ELAP to the State Water Board through the process established in California Health and Safety Code §116701.

9 What do I do once my assessment is complete?

For renewal applications, you will apply according to your existing application deadline. Include the On-Site Assessment Report and approved Corrective Action Plan from the TPA in your application package. Initial and amendment applications can be submitted upon completion of the assessment, assuming all other application requirements have been met as well.

10 Is the TPA accrediting my laboratory to do regulatory work in California?

No. The TPA is only performing the on-site assessment requirement needed to obtain CA ELAP accreditation. Some TPAs can offer accreditation to different standards and a laboratory can elect to pursue those accreditations in addition to the assessment if it wishes. However, you must apply to California ELAP and be granted accreditation from ELAP to submit results to a California regulatory agency. ***ELAP makes all decisions about accreditation.***