
State Water Resources Control Board

Frequently Asked Questions

Third Party Assessment: The Basics – page 1

1. What is a Third-Party Assessment Agency (TPA)?
A “TPA” is any NELAP-recognized state or non-governmental accreditation body that performs evaluations of environmental laboratories. These include any TNI state accreditation body (FL, IL, KS, LA, MN, NH, NJ, NY, OK, OR, PA, TX, UT, VA), any TNI-recognized NGAB (A2LA, ANAB, IAS, PJLA), or any DoD- or DoE-recognized accreditation body (A2LA, ANAB, PJLA).
2. What are their qualifications?
TPAs must prove they meet the extensive management and technical requirements in the TNI Standard for accreditation bodies, which is based on the international standard ISO 17011. They are evaluated every three years. This is very similar to the process a laboratory goes through to become accredited, but with different requirements. Part of the evaluation includes proving that assessors are qualified for the assessments they perform.
3. Which laboratories must use a TPA?
Laboratories with sophisticated technologies must use a TPA. Sophisticated technology means analytical instruments, detection systems, and/or preparation techniques requiring an advanced level of user understanding, including: gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS), inductively coupled plasma spectrometry (ICP), inductively coupled plasma/mass spectrometry (ICP/MS), liquid chromatography/mass spectrometry (LC/MS), atomic absorption spectrophotometry (AA), gas chromatography (GC), alpha particle or gamma ray spectrophotometry, electron microscopy (EM), polarized light microscopy (PLM), high pressure performance liquid chromatography (HPLC), bioanalytical assays, advanced molecular methods and other similar instruments or technologies.

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.

E. JOAQUIN ESQUIVEL, CHAIR | EILEEN SOBECK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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4. If my lab has both sophisticated and non-sophisticated technologies, do I need to have two assessments (one by a TPA and one by ELAP)?

No. The TPA should assess the full scope for which you plan to apply. If you were to have an assessment done by both bodies, you would need to pay two assessment fees – one to the TPA and one to ELAP.

5. Can a lab without sophisticated technology choose to use a TPA?

Yes! You do not need to use sophisticated technology to have a TPA assess your lab.

6. Will ELAP tell me which TPA to use?

No. Laboratories can select any qualified third-party assessment agency that has signed an agreement with the State Water Board. A list of TPAs will be maintained on ELAP's website.

7. Who pays the TPA?

The laboratory pays the TPA directly.

8. How much does it cost?

ELAP does not set the cost of the assessments, and laboratories should reach out to TPAs to find out the different pricing available. Labs that use TPAs will not be required to pay ELAP an assessment fee, but instead will pay ELAP only the application fee.

For more information on the Roadmap to ELAP Accreditation, visit

www.waterboards.ca.gov/elap.