

Deviating Samples

28th April 2005

Samples received in the laboratory that require particular attention when reporting test results

Some European Accreditation Bodies in recent times have experienced major problems in the laboratory environmental sector. It was found that some samples delivered to the laboratory for analysis that were clearly identified as deviating samples (e.g. samples not sampled properly or maintained in a stable environment prior to testing) were reported to their clients not in accordance with the accreditation standard ISO 17025.

Recently the Dutch Federation of Accredited Laboratories in co-operation with RvA (Raad Voor Accreditation) conducted an exercise and distributed samples for analysis to 32 laboratories. This comprised sending samples to both commercial and semi-government laboratories including four neighbouring European countries. The test samples circulated were clearly identified as deviated samples.

The findings of this survey were presented by RvA to the European Accreditation Laboratory Committee (EA LC). Of the 32 laboratories distributed with samples, 16 laboratories were accredited for the tests undertaken. RvA determined that only 7 of the 32 laboratories contacted the client about the deviating sample and none included a clear disclaimer in their reports, on 2 occasions only a vague statement was included.

While no such survey has been undertaken in Ireland, there is a real need for laboratories to pay particular attention to dealing with deviating samples. Accredited laboratories are reminded of the requirements contained in the accreditation standard ISO 17025 and their commitment in maintaining the accreditation standard:

Clause 5.8.3 Recording of deviating samples upon receipt and subsequent consultation with the client.

Clause 5.7.2 Deviation of a documented sampling procedure (e.g. pre-conservation) on request of the client shall be recorded and reported.

Clause 5.10.1 Results of tests shall be reported accurately, clearly, unambiguously and objectively.

The Irish National Accreditation Board for its part will continue to pay particular attention to assess accredited laboratories method of sample receipt and reporting of samples at forthcoming visits.