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NELAC Fact Sheet for State Agencies

Q: *What is NELAC?*

A: The National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) is a cooperative association of States and Federal Agencies, formed to establish and promote mutually acceptable performance standards for the operation of environmental laboratories. The standards cover both analytical testing of environmental samples and the laboratory accreditation process. Private sector input to the process is obtained through a variety of mechanisms including open semiannual meetings, participation on NELAC committees, and through the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board (ELAB), a federally chartered advisory committee with a balanced representation of the private sector, that provides advice to EPA and NELAC. The goal of NELAC is to foster the generation of environmental laboratory data of known and acceptable quality on which to base public health and environmental management decisions.

Q: *What is NELAP?*

A: The National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) is the program that implements the NELAC standards. States and Federal agencies serve as Accrediting Authorities with coordination facilitated by EPA to assure uniformity. Accreditation by one NELAP Accrediting Authority is mutually recognized by the other State and Federal Accrediting Authorities approved under NELAP. NELAP recognized 11 State programs as Accrediting Authorities in the summer of 1999. Additional states have begun preparing, or have already applied, for approval as Accrediting Authorities.

Q: *What are the program options?*

A: Each NELAP accrediting authority selects its areas of implementation, as identified in the Program Policy and Structure chapter of the NELAC standards. The state must first select the type of analyses that it will accredit, e.g., chemistry, microbiology, radiochemistry, microscopy, or whole effluent toxicology. Secondly, the state must decide on the EPA program area of application, e.g., those analyses conducted to demonstrate compliance with the Clean Air Act (CAA), the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), or the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA).

Q: *Does NELAP require that a state's accreditation program apply the NELAC standards to all types of laboratories?*

A: Nothing within NELAP alters the state's ability to determine the type of laboratory which must be accredited for compliance with state environmental regulations.

Q: *Does a state with an NELAP-recognized accreditation program have the option of making NELAP accreditation mandatory or voluntary for laboratories within the state?*

A: Once the state has developed a NELAP-approved accreditation program, the state may opt to mandate the program within their state, or operate it on a basis of voluntary participation by the laboratories. Any laboratory that is NELAP-accredited is required to meet the applicable NELAC standards in either case, but the state decides if participation in the program is required.

Q: *How does reciprocity work?*

A: To be approved as a NELAP accrediting authority, each state must agree to recognize the accreditation granted by any other NELAP accrediting authority for the applicable scope of laboratory

accreditation. States, however, have the right to withhold recognition of a laboratory's accreditation based on legal action which preclude the state from granting accreditation to a particular laboratory.

Q: *What are the costs for NELAP approval of a State accreditation program?*

A: EPA charges no fees to the states for approval of the states accreditation program. The Accrediting Authority assessment team, however, is composed of both federal and state officials. A request may be made for reimbursement of travel costs for assessors of state programs.

Q: *Does NELAP affect the assessment of fees of laboratories within a state?*

A: The assessment of fees is an individual state decision. The manner in which those fees are set, the basis for the fees, the amount of the fees, collection of fees, and enforcement of the fee payment are specific to the state. Although each NELAP accrediting authority must accept reciprocity, the state may establish a process and assess fees before granting such recognition.

Q: *Under NELAC, how is the accreditation of out-of-state laboratories handled?*

A: The NELAC structure requires a laboratory to seek accreditation first from the home state (state in which the laboratory is located). If that state is not a NELAP-approved accrediting authority or does not grant accreditation for a particular program or type of analysis, the laboratory may seek accreditation from any other state NELAP-recognized accrediting authority, for those programs/analyses not covered by the home state. A NELAP accrediting authority always retains the option of whether or not to accredit out-of-state laboratories, based on statutory limitations, resources or other factors.

Q: *Is the use of third party assessor bodies allowed under NELAP?*

A: A state may select to delegate any or all of its assessment activities to a third party assessor body as long as the state determines and grants the accreditation.

Q: *What if statutory or regulatory changes are needed?*

A: Provisions have been made in the NELAC Standards for a grace period for the early Accrediting Authority applicants to make statutory or regulatory changes for NELAP compatibility. In the meantime, they may be approved as NELAP accrediting authorities provided they are able to demonstrate that they can immediately implement the standards such that reciprocity among other NELAP accrediting authorities will occur. As the program matures, Accrediting Authority applicants will be required to demonstrate that their regulatory status is consistent with implementation of the NELAC Standards.

Q: *How can I obtain information on the NELAC standards?*

A: Point your Web Browser to <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/nelac>, where you can find a variety of resources, including copies of the NELAC standards and a list of the approved Accrediting Authorities.

Q: *When and where do I apply?*

A: Applications can be obtained from the web site (click on the NELAP Accrediting Authorities)

For more information or an application form, you can also contact:

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USEPA/ORD
3210 Hwy 54 (MD-75)
Research Triangle Park, NC 27711

For microfiche or hardcopies of the NELAC standards, contact:

NTIS
5285 Port Royal Road
Springfield, VA 22161
T: 1-800-553-6847 or 703-605-6000
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