

DRAFT

**SUMMARY OF THE
ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
Teleconference
November 29, 2007; 1:00 – 3:00 PM EDT**

The Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board (ELAB) meeting was held via regular teleconference on November 29, 2007 from 1:00 – 3:00 PM EDT. The original agenda for this meeting is provided as Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. Action items are included in Attachment C. The official signature of the Chair or Vice-Chair is included in Attachment D.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Pletl welcomed the members and took a roll call of the Board.

There were three guests that participated in the call: Ms. Lynn Bradley from the EPA and Steve Armstrong from the Florida Dept. of Health.

AGENDA ITEMS

APPROVAL OF OR CHANGES TO PREVIOUS MEETING/CALL MINUTES

Minutes from October 17, Meeting - There were no comments on the minutes. The Board approved the minutes from the October 17 meeting.

OFFICE OF SOLID WASTE LETTER

Dr. Pletl asked for comment on the OSW letter regarding the differences in holding times for the Office of Water and the Office of Solid Waste. Ms. Autry suggested that the acronyms should be spelled out the first time they're used in the letter, noting that this is an EPA policy for documents. Dr. Pletl asked if everyone was in agreement that the letter should go out under his signature. The board agreed with this. Dr. Pletl noted that getting these types of letters out quickly is one way the Board can be more active. Dr. Pletl thanked Mr. Dechant and Ms. Thomey for their work on this.

WORKGROUP REPORTS

Dr. Pletl asked Ms. Morgan to report on the Monitoring Work Group's activities. Ms. Morgan replied that there has not been additional work done since the last call. Ms. Bradley is getting information to them. Once the additional information is collected they will have another conference call to move forward.

Dr. Pletl asked for the report from the Laboratory Management Work Group. It was noted that Dr. Flowers was not present to give a report, however the group did not have a conference call in November.

Dr. Pletl asked for the report from the Measurement and Technology Work Group. Mr. Pardue replied that the group has been working on the TNI letter which will be discussed later in the meeting.

PENDING AND NEW BUSINESS

Website

Ms. Autry informed the group that the website should be up in early December. There is still some information missing and those places will have a “coming soon” place holder. When the website is live Ms. Autry will get a message and she will forward this to everyone. The remaining work is mostly just editorial and getting all the pieces in place. Mr. Lowery asked if information could still be added to the site. Ms. Autry replied that if information is provided she will try to include as much as possible. Information that can not be added for the 1st version will be added later during scheduled monthly updates. Mr. Wyeth sent some information about Drinking Water and NELAC and would like this to be put on the webpage. Dr. Pletl thanked Ms. Autry for her work on this.

Ms. Morgan told the group that the FEM methods collection website has an updated compilation of methods. She just wanted to inform everyone that it is there and give compliments to the group who did this work. Ms. Autry replied that Ms. Bradley did a fantastic job on this and she thinks this is an incredible tool; noting that everyone who has seen it agrees. Ms. Bradley stated that this page will be linked from the EPA’s homepage.

Homeland Security eLRN

Dr. Pletl noted that there will be a guest, Mr. Alan Antley from EPA, at the December meeting to discuss the Homeland Security eLRN document. He asked if Board members will be ready with questions and issues they want to discuss. Mr. Wyeth stated that he would like to hear about the level of participation from the commercial sector and how this may be enhanced. He stated that he knows they’re working on this and would like an update. Mr. Wyeth further noted that there is the issue of use of ultra-dilutes for some of the materials of extreme concern. There are questions about who will participate in these analyses and if they will need to go outside for the ultra-dilutes. Dr. Karimi noted that Mr. Wyeth brings up a good point. His understanding is that SPC in Maryland would distribute ultra-dilutes to other labs. There are issues about security at the labs, during transfers, and chain of custody. It is not known how these issues will be worked out. Mr. Wyeth suggested asking Alan for an update. Mr. Lowery suggested we should propose questions even if they might not have the answers as this will let them know where the stakeholder concerns are.

Dr. Karimi brought up the issue of reagents. Most of them will be common laboratory reagents but some may be specialized or have security issues. If a lab wants to participate they will need to work out the security of these agents. It was also asked if the EPA is addressing helping to fund this. Dr. Karimi replied that there is funding for maintaining the capabilities; with ultra-dilutes security and its cost is a hindrance. There is an internal agreement between the EPA and the Army that they can use reagents from the Army, not sure if this applies to commercial labs as well. It was suggested that the preliminary work of the lab getting up to speed may be something the lab has to fund. Dr. Karimi noted that they need a methods document on security and how they will address these issues. It may be that most of the reagents are common and do not have security issues. Dr. Pletl will capture these questions and asked Ms. Autry to pass them on to Alan.

Policy for Designating Chair and Vice-chair

Dr. Pletl asked if there were any comments on the drafted policy for designating a ELAB Chair and Vice-chair. It was agreed that the document was well written. There was one grammatical error which Dr. Pletl will send to Ms. Autry.

New Jersey letter

A letter was sent to Dan Hickman and Joe Aiello from Linda Freeman and Michael Taday discussing some data quality method issues that they claim are happening in New Jersey. The 1st question to address is if we need to confirm everything this letter claims and 2nd does this fit into the Board's charter.

It was noted that the methods addressed are not on the TNI or NELAC methods lists. It was asked if this is just a modification of methods for the state. Mr. Wyeth noted that if a lab does work with New Jersey than this is an issue. The claim is that these changes are not necessary or appropriate. It was noted that if this isn't a matter of labs being decertified or recertified than it doesn't have much to do with ELAB. Mr. Wyeth suggested that we should get an update to make sure we understand what the current position is now that NJ has allowed the labs to remain certified.

It was noted that it sounds like this is an issue between the labs and the state. Ms. Morgan noted that her lab certification is NELAC through New Jersey. Her understanding is that this is regulation for NJ. There are a small number of states that require extra certification for certain programs; this is an example of that. Dr. Karimi noted that if they want to change validation for everyone then that is wrong. However, if it is just for that one program in that state then this is nothing for us to be involved with. It was asked if the state should offer a modified method so that labs could be accredited to that method. Mr. Wyeth again suggested that we need an update to find out if this is the case and where this stands. Dr. Pletl noted that after this discussion he has a different take on the issue. It may be that the way this is presented in the letter may not reflect the real concerns. Mr. Wyeth will contact the authors to see if this is still a concern and to get more information.

TNI letter

There was a letter by TNI sent to Mike Shapiro and Kathy Callahan of EPA promoting lab accreditation and training for data users. TNI asked if ELAB would write a letter of support for this. Dr. Pletl asked for comments and if the board thinks this is something we should do. Mr. Wyeth noted that all he sees the letter asking for is support of the agency. He noted the basic concept is that labs should be accredited and use a quality system to do this. Mr. Lowery asked if this wasn't something that was gone over in the meeting with Dr. Gray. He suggested that the response should be that we gave support for this in our presentation and provide a copy of the presentation. Ms. Autry agreed with Mr. Lowery.

It was asked what TNI wanted and if they were asking for a letter or just moral support. Ms. Bradley noted that she has not seen this letter, however she has meet with Aurora Shields in promoting this issue. They would like to raise awareness of the value of accreditation in regulatory programs. Dr. Gray doesn't have much influence with the regulatory programs favoring accreditation. ELAB going to the programs with this may carry more weight.

Mr. Wyeth noted that we don't know exactly what they are asking for. The letter isn't addressed to ELAB; we received it as a CC from Ms. Judy Duncan. He further noted that they should know that ELAB is behind accreditation. Mr. Lowery suggested having Dr. Pletl call Ms. Duncan and asking her if there is anything else they want from us. Ms. Autry noted that Jerry Parr and Aurora were invited to meet with FEM and discuss with them what TNI does; this letter is a follow-up to that meeting. She thinks that ELAB was just copied the letter as an FYI because they know ELAB works with the FEM.

Flexible Approaches for Environmental Measurements

Dr. Pletl noted that Ms. Autry mentioned that the whitepaper on the Flexible Approaches for Environmental Measurements was presented to FEM for feedback. Ms. Autry replied that the paper was viewed favorably and FEM is ready to go forward with this. There was some discussion about a sentence that used “flexible requirements”; it was noted that this is an oxymoron and requested to reword this phrase. Ms. Autry stated that she is looking forward to adding the individual program sections. This is slated to be discussed at the FEM’s March meeting. It is that far off because there needed to be a large block of time set aside to give this the proper attention. Once the changes are all worked out, Ms. Autry will share the package with ELAB. It should be ready in January (minus the program sections). Feb 7th is the next FEM meeting and it is planned to have the package done by then. Ms. Autry told the group that there will be quite a bit more work that happens on this during the next year. There will be lots of speaking appointments to get the word out and EPA will be working with partners on pilot projects.

Mr. Lowey asked if ELAB would need to wait until after the Feb. FEM meeting to see this document. Ms. Autry replied that she would be happy to share drafts with the group before the next meeting with the understanding that it is a draft and needs to be kept private. She noted that this may not include the program sections as she doesn’t know the current status of those. It was asked if comments would be appropriate at this time. Ms. Autry replied that they would be.

Proficiency Testing Whitepaper

This paper has been discussed and some material has been provided to help determine which workgroup will be taking on which tasks. Mr. Lowery noted that his workgroup has a lot of information to go out and get. Collecting this information is going to take some time. He stated that his group wants to know who we are sending this to. Dr. Pletl replied that ELAB wanted to put together a paper that would address what the issues are with proficiency testing, in the hope that we can make recommendations to address these issues. The whitepaper will form the background for questions and recommendations for the Agency.

It was noted that PTs are an issue for a variety of organizations. However, in regard to the EPA, how PTs are set in regulatory documents is the main issue. The majority of the issues applied to TNI and accrediting authorities. We don’t have a directive to work with them. The EPA is not the driver to TNI, NELAC, and accreditation so is this actually something that should be going to the EPA. It was asked if this is not going to the EPA, then is it in ELAB’s purview.

It was stated that one of the concerns is the inconsistency of the drinking water regulation to TNI. Regulations say labs must run and pass 1 PT per year while TNI requires 2. The concern is that the ever increasing number of PTs is discouraging labs from joining a national laboratory program. Overlap and dual accreditation is another problem. This is something that falls under the ELAB charter if we really feel these issues are hindering a national accreditation program. Dr. Karimi noted that we need information from the states that are not a part of TNI if this is preventing them from joining. Mr. Wyeth does not think this is what we should be doing. Mr. Lowery replied that this is the task his group has been given to do. Mr. Wyeth suggested that TNI has already done this research. Mr. Lowery asked what the results were. Mr. Wyeth replied that he would need information from TNI about this.

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It was suggested that ELAB contact the EPA and notify them that this is occurring and find out if this will impact the EPA's regulatory drivers and if this will be acceptable within the EPA. It was felt that the group needs more information about why the Agency picked the number of PTs that they did as well as the history of how and why PT program exist in their current form. It was suggested that it would then be good to try to get everyone in line with a uniform number of PT samples.

Ms. Morgan noted that she has some historical information regarding DMR QA, a 1977 quality assurance letter and a Q&A doc. She will forward this information on to the Board members.

It was noted that there are other issues associated with PT. For example the way PTs are designed around technology and matrices. Is this the best approach or would some type of performance based approach be better? If you meet the performance standard then there wouldn't need to be a separate PT for every analyte done.

It was suggested the issue isn't if these problems exist the issue is if EPA has any power to make changes at this point. If EPA can't make the changes what is the point of making recommendations to them; we would be making recommendations to the wrong entity. It was noted the problem is that the ELAB charter does not allow us to make recommendations to TNI. Ms. Autry noted that the Office of Water has agreed to work with TNI in moving forward with trying to create a single program or even two uniform programs. ELAB can provide recommendations to the Office of Water. Ms. Autry noted that there is nothing that prevents ELAB from compiling information that is useful to another group, such as TNI. ELAB can't tell TNI what to do but if information gathered by the Board is useful to TNI as well as the Agency, the Board can certainly provide it to them.

Mr. Dechant asked if it would be appropriate to send a letter to either the EPA or the Office of Water stating that ELAB knows this is being discussed and offering ELAB's help. Ms. Autry replied that ELAB is already at the table and has attended a meeting on this, so the door is already open. Mr. Dechant wondered if it would be better to ask what information they may need from us so that we're not working parallel on issues they're already working on. Ms. Autry noted the document created by Versar is the crosswalk between the programs and is the starting point for this. Mr. Wyeth noted that based on the meeting he has attended with the Office of Water they are more than favorable to having ELAB work on this. He believes that if ELAB takes the initiative there will be a positive response from the Office of Water. He suggested ELAB lay out the issues we feel we can help them with specifically rather than just a nonspecific 'what would you like us to do'. Mr. Dechant suggested that the first approach needs to be less intense. He suggested showing the office a list and asking them which they would like to be done. Ms. Autry suggested writing the Office of Water and reminding them what ELAB has already done, i.e. the crosswalk and the possibility of revisiting that, show them a draft of the spreadsheet and ask them what they need done. Mr. Dechant, Mr. Wyeth, and Ms. Morgan volunteered to help with this. Ms. Autry noted that she can provide more access to Versar to provide support for this. Mr. Dechant asked for people to send any historical information they have that they would like to see included in this letter. Dr. Pletl asked when this draft might be done. It was agreed that this would be done for the Jan. meeting.

COMMENTS AND/OR ADDITIONAL ISSUES

Update from FEM

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Ms. Autry told the Board that the FEM is in the process of asking the Science Policy Council for approval of the third document in a series of documents for validation and peer-review. The first was for chemical methods, the second was for radiochemical methods, and the third is for sampling methods for chemical and radiochemical parameters. Ms. Autry further noted that FEM is expecting for this document to be blessed based on the response thus far. She noted that she is quite proud of having a document approved for the third year in a row. This last one is particularly responsive to a NGO report that was critical of not having this during the anthrax and 9/11 testing. She is also excited that we will have another document on microbiology for four years in a row.

Ms. Autry told the group that FEM is looking at the MBL report and has been identified to review that document. It may be possible that FEM will ask for ELAB's thoughts on how this might be more broadly used across the Agency. This was drafted specifically for the Office of Water and not any other office but it was known that there was potential for this to happen.

Ms. Autry noted the FEM will be working with the community as a whole on making accreditation a priority. They are also working on making accreditation a requirement within the Agency when they have tests done. Looking into how to do this is something that FEM will need ELAB's input on.

ADJOURNMENT

Dr. Pletl adjourned the Board meeting at 3:00 p.m. EST.

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Attachment A

**AGENDA
for
ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY ADVISORY BOARD MEETING**

November 29, 2007; 1:00 – 3:00 PM EDT

Conference Call

Call in number: 1-866-299-3188; code 9195415544#

	Topic	Individual Responsible
1	Opening Remarks	DFO
2	Roll Call for ELAB Members Introduction of Guests	Chair
3	Approval of or changes to Previous Meeting/Call Minutes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• October 17, 2007	Chair
4	Sample handling letter and OSW	Dechant and Thomey
5	Work Group Reports <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitoring Work Group• Laboratory Management Work Group• Measurement and Technology Work Group	Chair Morgan Flowers Lowry
6	Pending and New Business <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website, status, missing info?• Homeland Security eLRN<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. questions for December meeting guest?• Draft Chair/Vice-Chair Designation Policy• New Jersey Air Methods and ELAB charter• TNI letter to FEM• Flexible Approaches for Env. Measurement, FEM response• PT white paper	DFO All DFO/Chair All All DFO All
7	Comments and/or Additional Issues (Board Performance Measures)	All
8	Open Discussion and Comments from Guests	All
9	Review Action Items and Assignments	Chair
10	Adjourn/Closing Remarks	Chair/DFO

Attachment B

MEMBERSHIP LISTING AND GUESTS

ELAB MEETING

November 29, 2007; 1:00 – 3:00 PM EDT

Attendance (Y/N)	Name	Affiliation
Y	Dr. Jim Pletl (Chair)	Hampton Roads Sanitation District Representing: Municipal Env. Lab.
Y	Mr. Robert (Bob) K. Wyeth	Columbia Analytical Services, Inc. Representing: ACIL
Y	Ms. Lara P. Autry, DFO	US Environmental Protection Agency Representing: EPA
Y	Mr. Gerald (Gary) Dechant	Analytical Quality Associates, Inc. Representing: DOE Analy. Mgmt. Pgm.
Y	Mr. Paul Banfer	EISC (Environnemental Info. Sys. Corp.) Representing: Information Systems
Y	Ms. Nan Thomey	Environmental Chemistry, Inc. Representing: Small Laboratories
	Mr. Rock Vitale	Environmental Standards, Inc. Representing: Third Party Assessors
Y	Mr. Eddie Clemons	Golden Specialty Laboratory Representing: INELA
Y	Mr. Scot Cocanour	Promium Representing: Lab. Customers of Information Technology
	Dr. Jeff Flowers	Flowers Chemical Laboratories, Inc. Representing: Elected Officials for Local Gvt
Y	Dr. Reza Karimi	Southwest Research Institute Representing: Non-profit Research and Development Organizations with Academia
Y	Mr. Jeff Lowry	Environmental Resource Associates Representing: Proficiency Testing Providers
Y	Ms. Judy Morgan	Environmental Science Corp. Representing: Commercial Env. Lab.
	Mr. Joe Pardue	Parallax, Inc. Representing: Clients of QS Services

Attachment C

ACTION ITEMS

- Dr. Pletl will finalize the OSW letter and send it out.
- Send any information you would like to see included on the website to Ms. Autry.
- Ms. Morgan will provide a link to the FEM website.
- Dr. Pletl will capture these Homeland Security eLRN questions and asked Ms. Autry to pass them on to Alan.
- Mr. Wyeth will contact the authors of the NJ letter to see if this is still a concern and to get more information.
- Dr. Pletl will contact Judy Duncan regarding the TNI issue and ask what they would like to see from ELAB.
- Ms. Autry will send out the draft of the Flexible Approach whitepaper and members can provide comments if they wish.
- Ms. Morgan will send out the DMR QA paper.
- Provide Mr. Dechant, Mr. Weyth, and Ms. Morgan with any information you would like included in a letter to the Agency regarding the PT issue and where they would like us to direct our resources. They will have a draft letter for the Jan. meeting.

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Attachment D

I hereby certify that these are the final version of minutes for the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board Meeting held on October 17, 2007.

Signature Chairman

Jim Pletl

Print Name Chairman