



**American
Association
for Laboratory
Accreditation**



A2LA News:The Newsletter of the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation__ June 2002, Number 79

» **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

The Future of ILAC
 At 2002 Assessors Conclave, Improving the Assessment, Process was Key Theme
 International Team Evaluates A2LA
 NCSL International Workshop & Symposium
 Big Foot Sighting at A2LA
 Summary of the March 2002 Board of Directors Meeting
 Clarification – Requesting an Exception to the A2LA Traceability Policy
 Profile of Assessor Steve Lerman
 Nuclear Management Company
 ISO/IEC 17025 Alignment Revision Poll
 Fall 2002 Training Course Schedule
 Subscribe to the A2LA E-mail News Service
 A2LA Signs Agreement with Intertek Testing Services (ITS)
 A2LA Accreditations as of May 21, 2002
 Building Regulator Confidence in Accreditation
 Verify Accreditation Status

The Future of ILAC
 By Peter Unger

The International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) is the global forum for:

- the recognition of competent laboratory accreditation bodies which oversee and monitor the competence of testing/calibration laboratories and inspection bodies world-wide;
- the development and implementation of sound accreditation principles and practice,
- the promotion of laboratory accreditation to protect the health, safety and the environment, to ensure interoperability, and to facilitate global trade.

After successfully making the transition from conference to cooperation, ILAC is now entering a significant stage in its evolution. ILAC will incorporate by the end of 2002, enhancing its ability to represent the interests of laboratory accreditation with established global counterpart organizations. The articles of incorporation will include improvements in the definition of the membership categories. The bylaws are simultaneously being revised to reflect the new corporate structure.



Members of the ILAC Executive Committee

Several other important activities have been initiated. Under the conscientious leadership of Mike Peet, Chair of ILAC, a strategic planning process has begun. A clear definition of ILAC's mission, an ILAC vision, six strategic goals and several strategies identified to achieve these goals are being proposed. The Executive Committee, composed of volunteers throughout the world of accreditation, has provided the bulk of the energy to create this document. The ILAC Executive (see photo, from left to right, sitting: Hans Mittmann, Chair, Accreditation Policy Committee; John Gilmour, ILAC Past Chair and Consultant; Mike Peet, ILAC Chair; Belinda Collins, ILAC Immediate Past Chair; Peter van de Leemput, Chair, Technical Accreditation Issues Committee; sstanding: Annette Dever, ILAC Secretariat; Orna Dreazen, Unaffiliated Bodies Representative; Llewellyn Richards, APLAC Chair; Peter Unger; Chair ILAC Arrangement Management Committee; Alan Squirrell, ILAC Secretariat; Maribel Lopez, IAAC Chair; Daniel Pierre, EA Chair; David Stanger, Chair, Laboratory Committee; and Paul Davies, Chair Public Affairs Committee).

The ILAC strategic plan is intended to guide ILAC's activities for the next several years building upon the successful start in 2001 of the multi-lateral mutual recognition arrangement (simply known as the ILAC Arrangement). The strategic and business plan will enable more effective development of detailed action/work plans with a uniform focus. ILAC desires to be the preferred mechanism through which the recognition of competent laboratories and inspection bodies is carried out.

To achieve this vision, the first strategic goal is to enhance acceptance of the ILAC Arrangement among users of laboratory services in government, industry, and the professions. This is a significant challenge

but vital to achieve the ideal of "one test accepted everywhere, one accreditation accepted everywhere." ILAC also needs to address all global needs for accreditation services in economies without recognized laboratory accreditation infrastructure. Other goals address effective communications, increased use of technology, developing further strategic alliances, and maintenance of sufficient administrative resources.

The ILAC Secretariat continues to be very effectively managed by NATA Australia, which over the years has significantly subsidized its operation. ILAC needs to move forward to the day when its operation is fully funded by fees and other sources of revenue.

The first joint general assembly of ILAC and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF, cooperation for accreditation of certifiers) was held in Kyoto in November 2001. The two organizations are seeking ways to harmonize policies, positions and procedures of mutual interest and to reduce costs. The Japanese hosts provided a terrific venue and adroitly managed to accommodate a very large number of people into one room. Considering the perceived and real differences in the cultures of the two bodies, this first meeting can be considered a success. Tangible savings of these joint general assembly meetings accrues to liaison organizations which now only have to provide one report to both bodies and to those accreditation bodies having membership in both ILAC and IAF. The major outcome of the meeting was agreement to formally establish a Joint Committee on Closer Cooperation (JCCC) which will provide the management of all other joint activities. Joint committees for inspection body accreditation and developing country activities were also endorsed. Progress on the harmonization of peer evaluation processes was also reported.

The next general assembly meeting of ILAC will be held in Berlin, Germany from 22-26 September 2002. Check out www.ilac.org for more details.

[top](#)

At 2002 Assessors Conclave, Improving the Assessment, Process was Key Theme

The highlight of the 2002 A2LA Assessors Conclave was a four-hour Assessor Committee Meeting on March 11, during which about 100 assessors and a number of A2LA staff members engaged in a productive dialogue about a plethora of issues, from improving customer satisfaction to reducing the amount of paperwork being provided to assessors and laboratories:

As a result of the dialogue, A2LA agreed to take a number of actions:

- It will consider publishing instructions on the process for lodging complaints with A2LA on its web site.
- It will review the rationale for the two-year record retention requirement and consider alternative options for labs whose clients do not want data retained.
- This spring, it will complete development of an "assessor only" web page.
- It will take steps to improve staff implementation time for actions agreed on at the assessor conclave.
- It will revise the A2LA application procedure to require a new laboratory to submit its quality manual and uncertainty budgets with its application form to better determine the readiness of new applicants.
- It will propose revisions to the Assessor Checklist so that it can serve the purpose of the final report for the assessment and hopefully reduce the amount of report preparation time charged to laboratories. And,
- It will consider alternative formats for the conclave that would maximize the weekend time and enable all attendees to depart sooner.



Assessor Karen Dunning displays her 2002 A2LA Assessor Choice Award

The committee meeting concluded this year's conclave, a week-long series of meetings, training courses and sharing sessions geared to keep all persons with an active role in A2LA's assessment/accreditation programs, including assessors, association members and advisory committee members and laboratory representatives, informed about the latest developments and working together toward the goal of continuous improvement of the A2LA processes.

On the afternoon before the assessor committee meeting, assessors heard presentations on a number of timely assessment issues. Charles Francis, of the Mettler Toledo scale-manufacturing company spoke about Influences in Weighing; Roxanne Robinson, A2LA Vice President, led a review of revisions to the Assessor Guide and a review of revisions to the Proficiency Testing Requirements; Ramona Saar, A2LA Quality Manager, conducted a review of revisions to the A2LA Advertising Policy; and, finally, issues related to the new assessment standard, ISO/IEC 17025, were addressed.

A four-day Assessor Orientation Course was held from March 5 through 8th. It was attended by new

A2LA assessors and seasoned assessors in need of special training. Also included in the Assessor Conclave was a series of committee and subgroup events: meetings of the Accreditation Council and the Criteria Council; meetings of the Materials Testing Advisory Committee, the Measurement Advisory Committee, the Life Science Advisory Committee, the Electro/Mechanical Advisory Committee; meetings of the Electrical/EMC/TCB Assessor Breakout Group, the Construction Materials/Geotechnical Assessors Breakout Group, the Automotive Assessor Breakout Group, the Calibration Assessor Breakout Group, the Life Sciences Assessor Breakout Group, and the Automotive EMC group. Key issues discussed by assessors and stakeholders during these meetings were then brought to the attention of the Board of Directors at their meeting held later in the week.

A2LA wishes to thank the assessors, advisory committee and council members, and many volunteers for their participation in this year's event.

[top](#)

International Team Evaluates A2LA

An international team of accreditation experts, which included representatives from the Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC), the European Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation (EA), the Inter-American Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC), and the National Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation (NACLA), evaluated A2LA during the week of March 18-22, 2002. Additionally, representatives from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Voluntary Conformity Assessment Systems Evaluation (NIST/NVCASE), and the North American Calibration Cooperation (NACC) observed the evaluation.

The main goal of the evaluation was to verify A2LA's continued compliance with ISO/IEC Guide 58 (the international standard for laboratory accreditation bodies), the competence of the A2LA assessors and their ability to correctly assess laboratories to ISO/IEC 17025, and A2LA's compliance with additional applicable mutual recognition arrangement (MRA) and regulatory requirements.

A2LA was pleased that the various organizations agreed to work together on a joint evaluation. This unprecedented cooperation will significantly reduce the number of separate evaluations A2LA will have to undergo this year and will minimize the financial impact on A2LA.

A2LA is grateful to the laboratories that allowed the evaluation team members to witness their A2LA assessments and to the assessors for being willing to be evaluated and for handling the additional logistical aspects of these assessments.

A2LA will continue to seek the widest possible recognition. Each recognition increases the value of A2LA accreditation and helps to reduce the multiple audits accredited laboratories must still endure in some business sectors.

[top](#)

Annual NCSL International Workshop & Symposium

A2LA will be participating in the Annual Workshop & Symposium of NCSLI (the National Conference of Standards Laboratories International) being held in San Diego from August 4 to 8, 2002. A2LA representatives will be staffing the A2LA Booth, #606-608, in the Exhibit Hall. They invite you to visit, if you attend the conference.

Also, on the opening day, August 4, Peter Unger, A2LA President, and Roxanne Robinson, Vice President, will present a full day tutorial on "Laboratory Accreditation Practiced Nationally and Internationally." The session will provide an overview of laboratory accreditation practices around the globe, including requirements on calibration laboratories and their accreditation bodies under the ILAC mutual recognition arrangement (MRA) and the MRAs of regional and national counterparts.

For further information about the Workshop & Symposium, including registration details, please visit the NCSLI website, www.ncsli.org.

[top](#)

Big Foot Sighting at A2LA

The myths of Big Foot and the Loch Ness Monster have company - the myth of A2LA's backlog of applications. The truth is: there is no backlog. Because of current application policies and an expanded workforce, A2LA's maximum processing time from receipt of a complete application package to conduct of the assessment is less than 90 days.

The key for an applicant laboratory to avoid delay is to be sure its application package is complete. This means submission of the following documents:

- A completed Application Form, including signatures, selection list(s), scope content, and staff matrices;
- Completed ISO/IEC 17025 General Criteria Checklist;
- AEMCLAP prerequisite material (for AEMCLAP applicants only);
- Measurement Uncertainty Budgets (for Calibration labs only);
- Payment (including assessor deposit).

The backlog myth can be traced, in part, to a temporary situation that no longer exists. In the 1999-2000 period, A2LA received a large number of incomplete application packages from calibration laboratories seeking to meet the QS9000 deadline for accreditation of calibration services providers. On-site assessments were delayed, as missing application information was being sought. By now, most of these calibration laboratories have completed the accreditation process and the backlog has been eliminated.

In order to meet the 90-day standard, A2LA assiduously monitors staff response times and has established the following target turnaround times for processing a complete application:

- Internal processing of a complete application - within 2 weeks;
- Acceptance of assignment by the laboratory and assessor - within 1 week;
- Conduct of the assigned assessment - within 60 days.

Bottom line: Unless the applicant laboratory requests a longer process or extenuating circumstances arise, an A2LA assessor will generally perform the assessment within 90 days of A2LA's receipt of a completed application.

[top](#)

Summary of the March 2002 Board of Directors Meeting

The A2LA Board of Directors made a number of important decisions at its last meeting, on March 11 and 12, in Columbia, MD.

In addition to approving two new Accreditation Council members, Henry Chernow and David Evanson, and two new Criteria Council members, Tom Smith and Klaus Jaeger, the Board appointed a number of individuals to leadership positions on advisory committees:

- Assessor Committee: Nancy Foncannon, Chairman, and Bob Holcombe, Vice Chairman;
- Construction Materials Advisory Committee: Bill DeGroff, Chairman;
- Electro-mechanical Advisory Committee: Larry Gradin, Chairman;
- Life Sciences Advisory Committee: Frank Jarke, Chairman;
- Materials Testing Advisory Committee: Gary Cornell, Chairman, and Fred Fetterolf, Vice Chairman.

At its meeting, the Board also discussed the following issues:

- Fiduciary responsibilities of members of a non-profit board of directors;
- The status of A2LA's draft Code of Conduct, a document being developed to provide guidance to employees on proper ethical behavior;
- Legal copyright issues related to reproduction of ISO/IEC 17025;
- The pros and cons of the National Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation (NACLA) vertical recognition proposal (see related article on A2LA's annual meeting) and the importance to keeping A2LA accredited and enrolled laboratories informed of NACLA developments;
- The concept of accrediting laboratories for remotely monitored testing and calibration under limited conditions;
- A proposal to issue "sanctioned interpretations" to promote uniform compliance with ISO/IEC 17025 and other A2LA requirements;
- The status of new A2LA laboratory accreditation programs; and
- Increasing the value of A2LA membership and the participation of A2LA members.

The next meeting of the A2LA Board will be on June 6-7, at A2LA headquarters in Frederick, MD.

[top](#)

Clarification - Requesting an Exception to the A2LA Traceability Policy

In the last issue of [A2LA News \(February 2002\)](#) the matter of exceptions to the A2LA Traceability Policy was the subject of a lengthy Page 2 article, in which a number of case studies were outlined. The basis for the granting of an exception in Cases #1 and #2 is the laboratory's submission of "evidence of the results of [the laboratory's] unsuccessful search for a qualified calibration laboratory."

A2LA considers the following to be minimally sufficient "evidence" of an "unsuccessful search" for an

appropriate accredited calibration provider:

1. Equipment name and model;
2. Parameter and range of calibration needed;
3. Key words used in any website search for an accredited calibration provider;
4. List of all sources investigated (e.g., specific accreditation body websites, hardcopy directories, state metrology labs, etc.)

Laboratories requesting an exception to the Traceability Policy due to the lack of an appropriate accredited calibration provider must submit the above information to the A2LA staff, so that it can determine if an appropriate investigation has been made. Laboratories are asked to provide these data for each specific request. A2LA staff is unable to grant an exception until this information has been supplied and its accuracy verified.

[top](#)

Profile of Assessor Steve Lerman

According to a French philosopher, "Whatever you do with enthusiasm is generally successful." He might have had A2LA-assessor Steve Lerman in mind. How enthusiastic is Steve about assessing laboratories? One measure: he recently got a new license plate for his car: "ISO17025."



*Steve Lerman - A2LA's only known
17025 licensed Assessor*

Another metric of the Lerman enthusiasm is an hour's phone conversation with Steve, which we recently enjoyed. It's clear that assessing is more than a livelihood or a career. It's Steve's passion. His "personal goal is to do my job so well that whenever a new group talks about an accreditation program, my name surfaces - 'We've got to get Steve Lerman into this program.' My goal is to be the very best I can be at what I do."

We learned that Steve's career as an assessor began during his 20+ years as a chemist in the laboratories of Con Edison, the giant New York power company. Having been assigned to work in a nuclear power plant in the early 1980's, he was on the receiving end of frequent audits - and "very intensive audits" at that. So, when the nuclear division started performance (internal) audits, Con Edison asked Steve to take on the role of lead auditor.

While working for Con Ed, Steve saw an ad for a full-time senior appraiser with the New York Power Authority. ("An appraiser is a special kind of auditor/assessor, a concept that started with the famous Admiral Rickover. The standard used by an appraiser is the 'highest denominator,' that is, if there is a better way of doing something - it must be done that way. The optimum is the method that must be used. It's 'continuous improvement squared'.")

Steve couldn't resist such an opportunity, so he left Con Ed to become an "appraiser." In fact, he even established the appraisal program for the Power Authority's chemical group. Unfortunately, management's support for the new appraisal program was lukewarm and, when the Authority was reorganized, the program was dropped, and Steve Lerman was out of work. It was 1988. He put out his shingle as consultant. Not long thereafter, he read in Chemical Engineering News that NVLAP was looking for assessors in its accreditation program for asbestos testing labs. Three criteria were cited: proficiency in chemistry; familiarity with asbestos testing; and independent status. Steve met all three and soon became a NVLAP assessor - still is. He's one of the few assessors active in two NVLAP programs - asbestos and fasteners. He is also an assessor for the American Association of Industrial Hygiene. And during the short life of the American Petroleum Institute's program for labs that test reformulated gasoline, he was an assessor.

Finally, Steve achieved the optimum: A2LA. He took part in his first A2LA assessment in 1998. Now he's qualified in the fields of materials testing/automotive, industrial chemical and mechanical, and environmental. And he's A2LA's "official asbestos assessor."

When he's conducting assessments for one of his three clients, Steve is usually on the road for consulting assignments (technical training, OSHA training, quality work, etc.). The implications of this kind of schedule raised several questions.

Does he have a secretary to handle logistics?

"No one is detailed enough to work for me. Not even my wife. She is a wonderful sounding board when it comes to concepts for my business, but that's it."

How then does he manage his substantial scheduling challenge?

"I'm highly detailed and organized. I get this from my mother, who was organized beyond reason. I

take no credit - organizing comes easy to me. The other skill I'm blessed with is writing. Writing is effortless for me. For me, it's less trouble to write a full assessment report than a mini-report."

Does all the traveling get to him?

"I'm on a plane trip, on average, three out of four weeks. Fortunately, I like to travel. I'm not sure I like this much travel, but I can deal with it. Our children are grown. My wife has a career (as a nurse) and is very busy herself. But traveling so much can be disorienting. As another A2LA assessor says, 'When I wake up in the middle of the night, sometimes I don't even know where I am. The only way I can tell if I'm home is if there's a woman in bed with me'."

We asked Steve about his "assessor philosophy," and were told that he wants every assessment to be "a really good learning experience for the lab staff. I want them to know more after the assessment than they did before it."

"I think I often find more 'interesting' deficiencies than the average assessor. That is, I try to look beneath a lab's deficiencies for core problems. Here's an example from a recent assessment I did for A2LA. Our team found a lot of deficiencies - disconnects in the lab's operations. We were puzzled and said there's got to be a reason for this. We noted that there was only one supervisor for five departments. So we looked more closely into the departments and found they were suffering because of lack of leadership. So rather than merely cite a laundry list of deficiencies, we noted the underlying problem which should benefit the lab. I feel the true value of an assessment is more than a laundry list of details. The job of an assessor is to look for systemic problems."

Does accreditation work? Has the performance of laboratories improved because of it? "Yes, the labs are doing better. The improvement is most evident in the programs that have been consistent over time - like the asbestos program and the lead program. I've seen a huge amount of improvement in the quality systems and the technical work. In my view the real objectives of accreditation are to make sure that the really important things get done right and to keep raising the bar so there is continual improvement in the laboratories' performance." Even after 15+ years and 230 assessments, Steve's enthusiasm and passion have not waned. "It never gets dull. Every lab is different. The people are different. Each assignment is a new challenge. And all the assessors I talk to say the same thing. The job is not as repetitive as it might seem. I really enjoy the opportunity to enlighten people to the extent that I can. At the end of an assessment, when the lab's QA manager looks beat and tells me what an interesting experience it has been - that gives me satisfaction."

"One of the nicest compliments I ever got was from two relatively young managers of a lab I assessed a few years ago. They said, 'Mr. Lerman's audit was an eye-opener. And after his assessment, we feel we can face any future audits'."

[top](#)

Nuclear Management Company

Following a successful on-site evaluation in January, 2002, A2LA has been formally recognized by the Nuclear Management Company (NMC) as an approved supplier of calibration accreditation services. The NMC operates six nuclear power plants in the Midwest.

Upon written request from an accredited laboratory, A2LA will provide NMC with a full set of the laboratory's assessment records, scope of accreditation and certificate. NMC will review the records and reserves the right to request additional supporting information from the accredited laboratory if necessary.

[top](#)

ISO/IEC 17025 Alignment Revision Poll

A2LA is seeking input from the laboratory community about an ISO initiative that could lead to revisions in ISO/IEC 17025:1999. The stimulus for the initiative is the adoption of an updated standard for quality management systems registration, ISO 9001:2000. Standard 17025 incorporates the management elements of the now-replaced 1994 version of 9001. There is sentiment that supports changing the management elements of 17025 to bring them into alignment with the current 9001:2000 standard so that laboratories accredited to 17025 can state that they meet the relevant quality system requirements of the current 9001.

What is presently unclear is what is meant by "alignment," and how this would be practically handled in terms of an update of ISO/IEC 17025. ISO has established a working group (WG 25) to consider these issues. ISO standards are not normally revised so quickly after initial issuance; there is concern that such an alignment project may not be necessary just yet.

A survey has been developed to collect the viewpoints of the laboratories that will be directly impacted by potential revisions to ISO/IEC 17025. The questions in the survey aim to determine whether there is

a perceived need among laboratories for alignment at this time. Laboratory representatives are urged to complete and submit the survey, which can be found at <http://www.fasor.com/iso25/vote.html>.

Revised deadline for completing the survey is June 30, 2002. The laboratories' feedback will be presented by Peter Unger, A2LA President, at the July meeting of WG 25.

[top](#)

Fall 2002 Training Course Schedule

Title: ISO 17025 and Accreditation

- September 9-10, 2002 - Columbia, MD
- November 4-5, 2002 - San Antonio, TX

Title: Introduction to Measurement Uncertainty For Testing Labs*

- September 11-12, 2002 - Columbia, MD
- November 6-7, 2002 - San Antonio, TX

Title: Introduction to Measurement Uncertainty for Calibration, Mechanical and Dimensional Labs*

- September 11-13, 2002 - Columbia, MD
- November 6-8, 2002 - San Antonio, TX

Title: Advanced Measurement Uncertainty Seminar

- September 16, 2002 - Columbia, MD
- November 11, 2002 - San Antonio, TX

For a description of these courses and information on registration costs, please visit our web site, www.a2la.org and click on the "Training Catalog" link. You can also contact Ms. Julie Stevens, A2LA Training Coordinator, at (301) 644 3235 ([e-mail: jstevens@a2la.org](mailto:jstevens@a2la.org)).

**If you are not sure which measurement uncertainty course is applicable, please contact A2LA.*

[top](#)

Subscribe to the A2LA E-mail News Service

A2LA invites readers to visit the A2LA web site, www.a2la.org, and subscribe to the news service. Subscribers receive news releases and notices of updates to the A2LA web site. A2LA-authorized representatives of accredited and enrolled laboratories, proficiency testing providers, reference material producers and inspection bodies are encouraged to subscribe so as to keep informed about updates in A2LA policies and requirements.

[top](#)

A2LA Signs Agreement with Intertek Testing Services (ITS)

Under a new agreement signed by A2LA and ITS in March of this year, in-house and commercial laboratories can now seek joint A2LA laboratory accreditation to ISO/IEC 17025 and ITS quality management system registration to ISO 9000:2000 for the laboratory (or the manufacturing facility) with a single on-site assessment.

The quality management system portion of the assessment and the technical portion of the assessment will be conducted by qualified ITS and A2LA technical experts trained specifically by A2LA.

Laboratories that wish to achieve both accreditation and quality system registration must apply to ITS and A2LA directly and express in writing to both ITS and A2LA their desire to be accredited by A2LA and registered by ITS under the A2LA-ITS agreement. A2LA staff and ITS personnel will then work together to identify the qualified team of assessors and help coordinate the joint on-site assessment to ensure a more efficient and economical process for our client organizations.

For more information about this special program, please contact A2LA Vice President, Roxanne Robinson at (301) 644 3208 or via e-mail at rrobinson@a2la.org. You can also contact the ITS Liaison Officer, Joanne Klos, at (978) 929 2113 or via e-mail at joklos@etlsemko.com.

[top](#)

A2LA Accreditations as of May 21, 2002

Accreditation Programs	Number of Accredited Organizations	Number of Applicants Seeking Accreditation
Testing Laboratories (by field)		
- Acoustics & Vibration	23	0
- Biological	37	5
- Chemical	210	12
- Construction Materials	83	3
- Electrical	135	29
- Environmental	65	12
- Geo-technical	37	1
- Mechanical	659	34
- Non-destructive	21	2
- Thermal	9	0
Calibration Laboratories	330	39
Proficiency Testing Providers	3	1
Reference Material Producers	3	0
TOTAL	1615	138

[top](#)

Building Regulator Confidence in Accreditation Theme of Annual Meeting Keynote Address

How to persuade Government regulators to believe in and rely on third-party laboratory accreditation bodies (ABs)? That's a question supporters of accreditation have been wrestling with for years.

The question was addressed by Dr. Richard Kayser, Director of Technology Services at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), in his keynote talk at the 2002 A2LA Annual Meeting, held at the Sheraton Hotel in Columbia, MD, on March 11. NIST is a uniquely important stakeholder in accreditation because of its charge under the National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1996 to coordinate all U.S. conformity assessment activities, including the area in most need of coordination - lab accreditation.



Dr. Richard Kayser, Director of Technology Services at NIST

To help it fulfill its accreditation objective, NIST signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation (NACLA) two years ago. The MOU creates a partnership, whereby NACLA evaluates ABs and grants recognition to those found to be in compliance with international standards and NACLA protocols and NIST promotes reliance on NACLA to Government regulators and agencies. In his talk, Dr. Kayser:

- Described the progress of the NIST-NACLA partnership, to date; and
- Gave the details of a recent NIST proposal that it believes will enhance the success of NACLA.

On the former, he reported that 140 telecommunications laboratories accredited by NACLA-recognized ABs now have their data accepted in the EU as part of the U.S.- EU mutual recognition agreement. Also, in late 2001, the Dept. of Energy's nuclear weapons laboratories announced plans to curtail their own audits of calibration laboratories and to rely on calibration laboratories accredited by NACLA-recognized ABs. Further, Dr. Kayser said that NIST will be intensifying its efforts to promote NACLA to other Federal entities.

The NIST recommendation to the NACLA leadership is twofold: that NACLA broaden the group that votes on the competence of an applicant AB to include representatives of several stakeholder constituencies (currently, only the recognized ABs have the vote); and that NACLA separate recognition of a qualified AB from the NACLA MRA (mutual recognition arrangement) and make it optional for the AB to sign the MRA. (Currently, once an AB has been evaluated and found to be competent, it is invited to sign the MRA - and becomes recognized only by signing the MRA.)



Peter Unger, A2LA President

In the opinion of NIST officials, these changes would diminish the perception of conflict of interest in the voting process; would create a more logical system; would attract more ABs to apply to NACLA; would more directly satisfy the desires of users of accreditation, many of whom are interested not in the MRA but in the competence of ABs; and would make it easier for NIST to "sell" NACLA to Federal agencies. Dr. Kayser said he was aware of several ABs who would like to be evaluated and recognized by NACLA but who would prefer not to sign the MRA with other recognized ABs.

The NIST recommendation is now being studied by NACLA. A2LA leaders believe this proposal runs counter to A2LA's mission and NACLA's aim of providing one accreditation accepted everywhere.

Other speakers at the A2LA Annual Meeting included:

- Douglas Berg, A2LA Chairman, who presented an overview of A2LA's activities in 2001;
- A2LA President Peter Unger. He cited 10 current myths about laboratory accreditation and dispelled each. He also discussed efforts to align ISO/IEC 17025 with ISO 9001:2000, ILAC's goals for 2002, and important issues being addressed by A2LA.
- Ken Stoub, Criteria Council Chairman, and Doug Lentz, Accreditation Council Chairman, each of whom summarized the activities of their group in the past year.



Doug Berg, Chairman of the A2LA Board

The 2003 A2LA Annual Meeting will be held on March 10, 2003 in Columbia, Maryland.

[top](#)

Verify Accreditation Status

We often receive phone calls from individuals who want to know the accreditation status of a particular lab. Has the lab applied for accreditation? Has the lab achieved accreditation? If so, for which types of testing/calibration activities is the lab accredited? To make an informed purchasing decision, obtaining the correct answers to these questions is important. The following information may help to clarify these issues.

Accredited or Not Accredited?

A lab is either A2LA-accredited or it is not. To confirm accreditation, a lab must demonstrate that it holds a valid Scope of Accreditation and Certificate. A **valid** Scope of Accreditation is one whose "anniversary date" has not passed. The "anniversary date" is like an expiration date. It is assigned to the lab at the time of initial accreditation and normally covers a two-year period. All laboratories that maintain A2LA accreditation are listed in our searchable web database (www.a2la.org).

Six months in advance of the expiration of the accreditation, the renewal process is initiated. At times, a laboratory's accreditation expires before the renewal process is completed. Delays on the part of the lab, A2LA, or the assessors can cause this to happen. Upon request, A2LA can grant a laboratory in good standing an extension to its accreditation and issue a revised Scope of Accreditation that reflects the extended anniversary date. The extensions are reflected on our web site. Not all requests for extensions are granted, and not all laboratories request an extension. **The net effect is that some of the laboratories listed on the searchable database may have an expired Scope of Accreditation.**

As a public service, A2LA's web site includes a separate listing of laboratories whose accreditation was withdrawn **prior** to their anniversary date. Reasons for such withdrawal include laboratory closures, mergers, or voluntary decisions to discontinue the accreditation. Alternatively, a laboratory's accreditation may be withdrawn by A2LA when the laboratory is not able to demonstrate continued compliance with the accreditation requirements. Whatever the reason, the laboratory is no longer accredited and will not appear on the searchable database on our web site.

A2LA staff members can confirm the accreditation status of any laboratory and can also confirm if a laboratory with an expired scope is actively pursuing re-accreditation.

Applicant or Not an Applicant?

A2LA protects the confidentiality of applicant laboratories and cannot reveal the identity of an applicant unless the laboratory waives its right to anonymity.

If the right is waived, A2LA can inform callers that the laboratory has applied for accreditation but cannot provide any details on the results of the on-site assessment. Upon request, A2LA can provide "status" letters to applicant laboratories. These status letters will include as much detailed information as the applicant authorizes. A typical status letter might state: "This letter serves to confirm that laboratory ABC applied for A2LA accreditation on xx/xx/xx (date) and was assessed on xx/xx/xx. The laboratory responded to cited deficiencies on xx/xx/xx, and the laboratory's assessment package was sent to the A2LA Accreditation Council on xx/xx/xx."

While no decision on accreditation has yet been made, a status letter is helpful to the applicant laboratories that wish to demonstrate to their clients that they are progressing through the accreditation process. It is also an effective way for clients to get official confirmation that their suppliers of testing or calibration services are indeed seeking accreditation.

Is the Testing or Calibration Activity Covered by the Lab's Accreditation?

A2LA accreditation is limited to those specific tests/calibration activities documented on a lab's official A2LA Scope. There may be testing/calibration activities performed by the laboratory that are not covered under its Scope and that are, therefore, not accredited. When placing work with an accredited laboratory, it is important to review its Scope of Accreditation to confirm that the laboratory is accredited for the specific testing/calibration activities you need. Activities not listed on the Scope have not been assessed by A2LA's technical assessors to verify that the laboratory is competent to perform them.

Under the interpretations of Clause 4.6.3 of ISO/IEC 17025, it is the responsibility of the laboratory *purchasing testing/calibration services* to make sure that the specifications related to the purchase of those services contain any quality requirements that need to be met. If the quality requirements include, for example, the need to obtain accredited calibration services to meet [A2LA's Policy on Traceability](#), then the purchasing documents issued must specify this. Under the interpretation of Clause 4.4 of ISO/IEC 17025, it is then the responsibility of the calibration service provider to ensure that it has the resources and capability to meet the specific accreditation requirements of the requesting laboratory (as documented in the purchasing documents). If the calibration service provider is not accredited for the specific calibrations, it cannot provide the accreditation as requested in the purchasing documents. The calibration service provider is then obligated to advise you of that.

Before placing work with a laboratory, be sure to take time to ensure it can meet your needs for accredited testing/calibration. And, whenever in doubt about this, phone A2LA. Our staff members can assist you in verifying the accreditation status of the laboratories within our system.

[top](#)

[privacy statement](#)

[a2la](#)

© American Association for Laboratory Accreditation