

NELAC Accreditation

NELAC (National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference) began in 1990 when the EPA's Environmental Monitoring & Management Council (EMMC) established the Committee on National Accreditation of Environmental Laboratories (CNAEL) to determine whether a national environmental laboratory accreditation was feasible or advisable. CNAEL recommended a program be established, so the EPA and state representatives formed a focus group, which developed the framework for the NELAC.

When NELAC was formed in 1994, it had two major functions; standards development and standards adoption. In 2002, there was an amendment to the Constitution and Bylaws to designate NELAC as the standards adoption body. The main responsibility is to review recommended standards from other consensus standards-development organizations and to determine if they should be adopted. NELAP is the program which implements the standards adopted by NELAC. These standards cover many of the EPA programs such as the Safe Drinking Water Act, The Clean Water Act, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.

The states are the primary accrediting authority, so laboratories seeking NELAC certification must apply in their home state if it is one of the 11 states that participate in NELAC. The states participating include: California, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Utah. If the laboratory is not located in one of the NELAC states, they can apply for NELAC accreditation through one of the above-mentioned states. NELAP accreditation is much like the direct state certification, in that it requires a similar application which includes: a demonstration of the qualification of the laboratory personnel, laboratories are required to pass two consecutive PE Studies and an on-site inspection one every three years.

One of the objectives of NELAC is to adopt a uniform set of standards by which environmental data is produced from various sources by promoting comparability and defensibility. In addition, NELAC makes rules and regulations for laboratory certification uniform, so laboratories are not trying to meet 50 different requirements from individual states and other accrediting authorities. This can significantly reduce certification costs for the laboratories by reducing redundant accreditation activities, such as on-site audits. Once NELAC accreditation has been granted by one of the primary accrediting authorities it can be used to obtain secondary accreditation in other states that participate in NELAC

This information provided in this article was obtained from the United States Environmental Protection Agency website as follows: www.epa.gov/nelac

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