

Benefits of Accreditation

HOW DOES USING AN ACCREDITED LABORATORY/CERTIFICATION BODY/INSPECTION BODY BENEFIT GOVERNMENT AND REGULATORS

Introduction

Government bodies and regulators are constantly called upon to make decisions related to:

- ◇ Protecting the health and welfare of consumers and the public
- ◇ Protecting the environment
- ◇ Developing new regulations and requirements
- ◇ Measuring compliance with regulatory and legal requirements
- ◇ Allocating resources, both technical and financial

In order to make informed decisions, government bodies and regulators must have confidence in the data generated by conformity assessment bodies [laboratories, certification bodies (management systems/product/personnel) and inspection bodies]. Using accredited conformity assessment bodies can help to establish and assure this confidence.

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is the process of providing recognition to an organization for its competence in performing specific tasks. It involves the assessment of technical competence of organizations in providing conformity assessment service(s). Conformity assessment services include testing, certification (management systems/product/personnel) and inspection.

Accreditation also applies to calibration laboratories, proficiency testing and production of certified reference materials.

What are the benefits of using accredited conformity assessment providers?

- ◇ Increases confidence in the data that is used in decision-making.
- ◇ Reduces uncertainties associated with decisions that affect the protection of human health and the environment.
- ◇ Increases public confidence.
- ◇ Reduces costs associated with repetitive testing/inspection/certification and lost time is minimized.
- ◇ Facilitates trade and economic growth.

Worldwide Trends in Accreditation

During the 20th century, accreditation was predominantly seen as a voluntary activity. However, in many economies now accreditation has been

embraced by governments as a mandatory activity in many regulated areas because of the benefits accreditation brings to help governments meet their responsibilities and safeguard the public. For example, **in the Asia Pacific region**, APEC (the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), endorses accreditation with the Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC) recognized as an APEC Specialized Regional Body. Accreditation is now used to underpin the conformity assessment component of the APEC agreements.

Similarly, **ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations)** with its 10 Members States has included accreditation in the ASEAN sectoral mutual recognition arrangement for electrical and electronic equipment as a means of meeting the mandatory requirements of each member and to facilitate the implementation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA).

In Europe, a legal framework for the provision of accreditation services across Europe is written into regulation which recognizes the benefits of accreditation by legislating that it be used as a means to show compliance with the mandatory requirements. The regulation came into effect in January 2010 and covers the operation of accreditation in support of voluntary conformity assessment as well as conformity assessment required by legislation. The regulation also recognizes the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA) as the coordinating organization for the national European accreditation infrastructure.

In the Americas regulators and governments are increasingly relying on results from accredited laboratories to meet their mandatory requirements in areas as diverse as food safety, environmental protection, toy safety and the quality of concrete, steel, electrical products and a variety of other products and services. The respective regulators have all made accreditation a core element of their policy making strategy. The Inter American Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC) is committed to disseminating the concepts and advantages of accreditation and is responsible for ensuring that accreditation bodies in the region operate their programs to stringent international requirements.

In New Zealand and as part of the Government's support of their food industry export drive, the Ministry for Primary Industries requires all animal products (dairy, meat, fish even honey etc.) to be tested in an accredited laboratory. Similarly the New Zealand, Health Act requires that drinking water for domestic consumption be tested in an accredited laboratory.



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The Hong Kong Housing Authority builds an average of 20,000 flats per year for the public sector of Hong Kong. The quality of building materials and components is a prime concern to the Housing Authority and the industry since rework of any non-complying building products would have time & cost implications to the housing projects. The Housing Authority specifies the requirement to use certified products for ten major building materials in its construction projects. Accredited product certification provides a reliable means for assuring production quality throughout the whole production process from incoming raw materials, production, inspection, sample selection and testing.

In the SADC region and within the **health sector** a number of countries in the region have recognized the importance of medical laboratory systems as an integral part of the health delivery system and have in their policies embraced accreditation as a strategy for the competence of medical laboratories. Within the **occupational health and safety** sector and in order to have confidence in the data generated by inspection bodies in Zimbabwe, the National Social Security Authority (NSSA) under which the Factories and Works Inspectorate falls hence the regulator requires all inspection bodies to be accredited in accordance with ISO/IEC 17020 in order to be registered as an independent inspection authority.

The international accreditation organizations ILAC and IAF together with ISO and the Independent International Organization for Certification (IIOC) have established the following websites

www.publicsectorassurance.org which showcases different global examples where accreditation has been used to support public policy efforts. From assisting forensic science in the UK, to effective voluntary programmes in the US, to improving the delivery of food safety in Australia, to protecting consumers in the safety of products in the Gulf Coast Countries, to supporting sustainable animal health in Botswana, the site demonstrates real examples where public policy is being delivered using accreditation.

A link to the public sector assurance site is provided on the SADCAS website **www.sadcas.org** under the window on links.

www.business-benefits.org which showcases benefits of standards and accreditation through case studies, research papers, and supporting materials. The examples published on the site cite tangible financial data to evidence the cost savings achieved whether through resource efficiency or meeting regulation at lower cost, the value of accessing new markets, or savings achieved through recognition from organizations such as insurers, regulators or purchasers. The site contains case studies from multinationals such as IBM, Chrysler, and Hitachi to national companies such as Aberdare Cables and Pretoria Portland Cement Company.

Who accredits laboratories/certification bodies/inspection in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)?

The Southern African Development Community Accreditation (SADCAS) is a multi-economy accreditation body established to service the accreditation needs of 13 SADC Member States excluding South Africa and Mauritius who have national accreditation bodies South African National Accreditation System (SANAS) and Mauritius Accreditation Service (MAURITIUS) respectively. SADCAS is a non-profit limited company incorporated in Botswana. It was approved by the SADC Council of Ministers in 2007 as a subsidiarity organization of SADC and therefore is an agency of SADC. The multi economy accreditation body is a cost effective model whereby a number of countries share one accreditation body.

SADCAS offers accreditation schemes for:

- ◇ Calibration laboratories to ISO/IEC 17025
- ◇ Testing laboratories to ISO/IEC 17025
- ◇ Medical laboratories to ISO 15189
- ◇ Management systems certification bodies to ISO/IEC 17021-1
- ◇ Product certification bodies to ISO/IEC 17065
- ◇ Personnel certification bodies to ISO/IEC 17024
- ◇ Inspection bodies to ISO/IEC 17020

For more information on the SADCAS accreditation process contact:

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OR

The National Accreditation Focal Point based in the SADC Member States serviced by SADCAS. Refer to the website www.sadcas.org for the contact details of National Accreditation Focal Points