

June 2005

Calibration of Rocks? Calibration Certificates--Acceptance or Not?

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A number of questions arise around the issue of acceptance of calibration reports from accredited calibration laboratories by States. Do you accept them or not? How do you know if they are okay to accept? What are the related issues? What are the steps to determine what is okay and what is not?

First - you must determine whether your State laws (statutes, regulations, or rules) allow acceptance of calibration reports from other laboratories. This is usually under reciprocity agreements for registered/licensed service agents. Some State laws do not allow acceptance of calibration reports from other laboratories and doing so can be a violation of your own laws. Proposals for modifying the model laws in Handbook 130 were developed to help States gain the authority for accepting calibration reports in a uniform and consistent way.

Second - if your laws allow acceptance of calibration reports from other laboratories whether accredited or not, you need to determine which laboratories are covered (States only? Accredited only? All?). Determine whether the laboratory is accredited and evaluate which accreditation bodies are acceptable. All laboratories are not accredited or recognized. And, all accreditations are NOT equal!

NIST recommends 1) only reports from accredited or recognized calibration laboratories be accepted and 2) the recognition or accreditation needs to come from NIST or a NACLA-approved accreditation body. NACLA is the North American Calibration Laboratory Association and is the body that ensures the quality of the accreditation. If a laboratory is not accredited or recognized, do not accept the calibration report. At this time, the only accreditation bodies who have been approved by NACLA are: NVLAP, A2LA, and L-A-B. There are many laboratories, including some manufacturers, who are not accredited or are not accredited by one of these bodies.

Third - you need to evaluate the "scope of accreditation." The laboratory scope, which is published with the accreditation or recognition certificate, defines the parameters and associated uncertainties that have been assessed by the accreditation bodies. Many laboratories that are accredited, even by NACLA-approved bodies, still provide services that are NOT under their scope of accreditation. For example, a laboratory that is accredited to provide Class F calibrations may not be accredited to provide Class 1 calibrations. Being accredited in general is not enough. The laboratory scope must cover the level of service that is needed. In addition, many accredited laboratories have services that are under their scope, but they do not provide a full "accredited calibration." Certificates of Accuracy and Traceability Certificates are generally not under the scope and should not be accepted. An accreditation body logo should be on anything that is accepted.

Finally, States must retain the authority and right to oversee the evaluation of standards used in weights and measures activities. Accreditation does NOT provide any assurance that the standards identified in a calibration report are suitable for the intended applications. For example, a laboratory that is accredited by a NACLA-approved accreditation body could have the calibration of ROCKS on their scope and be able to meet their stated uncertainties. BUT, that doesn't mean that the ROCKS comply with the field standards requirements for weights used in evaluating scales for compliance to Handbook 44 (e.g., Class F). The State must still evaluate standards to ensure suitability. States also need to retain the rights to revoke acceptance of certificates for cause (bad measurement results).