

AGTA DECEMBER 2004 NEWSLETTER

News from NATA

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1. Construction Materials Testing Accreditation Advisory Committee

NATA's Construction Materials Testing Advisory Committee (CMT AAC) met on 23 July 2004 in Melbourne.

Items of particular interest to member laboratories included:

- The role of NATA as a member organisation in light of the adoption of ISO 17011 and its restrictions concerning "consulting" by accreditation bodies.
- Problems associated with the large number of test methods, particularly the state road authority methods which are similar to AS methods. NATA has been asked to consult with the state road authorities on this.
- Establishing criteria for competency standards for signatories and the need for formal training of laboratory staff.
- Proficiency testing, inter-laboratory testing, NATA's involvement and the need for increased proficiency testing and measurement of competence.
- Revision of the Annex Laboratory Policy (Policy Circular #6).
- Revision of Technical Circular # 3 concerning Measurement Uncertainty
 - Policy to cover requirements concerning statements of compliance;
 - Requirement concerning the number of significant figures required for reporting and whether this matches the measurement uncertainty of the test (this is often a problem with some state road authority methods)

2. NATA Staff

Recently, there has been a number changes to NATA Construction materials Testing staff. Peter Young the Manager Construction Materials Testing resigned from NATA in October to take up a more relaxed lifestyle in rural Victoria. Amanda MacFarlane, the Regional Manager for Queensland resigned to take up part-time work and also have a more relaxed lifestyle.

Bettina Poxleitner will take up the role of Manager Construction Materials Testing in Melbourne from early December 2004. A decision concerning replacement of Amanda will be made early next year. In the meantime, Jan Findlay will be the focal point for laboratories in Queensland. However, feel free to contact Craig Smith or Shane Clements in the NATA Brisbane office or Bettina in the Melbourne office if the need arises.

As a result of these changes, there may be some delays in meeting your requests for variations to the scope of accreditation, signatories and annex laboratories. It is hoped that NATA can continue to meet its Charter of Service but urgent requests are going to be difficult to meet in the short term. Please let NATA know as soon as you know about any required changes so that we can try to make them to meet your requirements.

3. Nuclear Gauges

Standards Australia has issued a draft revision of AS 1289.5.8.1. A number of editorial and minor changes have been made to cover the current practice. In particular, the monthly consistency check has been revised to cover a limited number of depths when gauges are only being used at these depths. Laboratories may need to consider whether there is a risk in not performing these checks at all depths.

When reviewing its Technical Note #32 on the Use of Nuclear Gauges, NATA discovered an anomaly regarding the prescale factors that are currently being used. The figures given in the old manufacturer's handbooks for Troxler gauges were for One-minute counts, yet these were being used for the four-minute daily standard count check. So instead of using a value of 16 or 8, Troxler considers we should be using 64 or 32. Similarly, these factors need to be used for Humboldt gauges. This would also imply that a prescale factor of 4 should be used for a Campbell Pacific MC3, but NATA has not been able to confirm this with the manufacturer. If you have a MC3 you should try to find out about this from CPI.

The factor used will affect the limits currently specified in AS 1289.5.8.1. This is to be raised at the public comment stage.

As a result of the problem with prescale factors, the recently released Technical Note 32 – Use of Nuclear Gauges has been withdrawn until the issue can be finalised.

4. Measurement Uncertainty

At each reassessment, laboratories need to have assessed whether the test methods they use continue meet all the requirements ISO/IEC 17025 and NATA Technical Circular #3.

As can be seen from the issues raised at the Construction Materials Testing Accreditation Advisory Committee Meeting, Note 2 is not the only requirement that needs to be met.

Measurement Uncertainty needs to be estimated when the reporting required by the test method is not consistent with the uncertainty of measurement of the test result and when statements of compliance are required by the client.

NATA Technical Circular #3 has listed Australian Standards which have been reviewed and are considered to meet Note 2 of Clause 5.4.6.2 of ISO/IEC 17025. When another method states that it is similar to the Australian Standard, laboratories need to consider the differences between the methods to determine if the method which refers to the AS method meets Note 2 as well.

All methods which are not listed in the NATA Technical Circular #3 need to be reviewed against ISO/IEC 17025. Laboratories need to document what the review has involved and, if required, justify their decision about the method meeting Note 2 and other requirements of ISO/IEC 17025.

Prior to 30 April 2005, laboratories need to have documented the sources of uncertainty and to provide a schedule of when the estimates are to be completed. From 30 April 2005, all methods that do not meet the requirements of ISO/IEC 17025 need to have Measurement Uncertainty estimates available at the reassessment.

What is happening south of the border

The Roads and Traffic Authority (NSW) has introduced a system of registration of laboratories for its major contracts. The reason behind the registration is a concern that poor testing practice has contributed to early distress on new projects. The RTA is attempting to improve testing in the immediate future and is researching different assessment techniques in the longer term. It is possible that Queensland Main Roads Department may follow this registration system in the near future.

The registration system requires:

- NATA Accredited laboratories
- Accreditation to establish annex laboratories
- More frequent surveillance by NATA (six-monthly)
- More frequent proficiency and intra-laboratory testing
- Access by the RTA to NATA reports on assessment
- Access to records on site by the RTA and the contractor
- Reporting compliance with specification (MU may not be required)
- Methods of payment for testing
- Corporate requirements concerning insurances, etc.

NATA is discussing these issues with the RTA on a continuing basis. The registration requirements are stipulated by RTA and NATA has agreed to support the process by providing additional surveillance and managing the proficiency testing.

5. Establishing annex laboratories

If you are required to establish annex laboratories on a regular basis, it is worthwhile considering becoming accredited to establish annex laboratories. The requirements are detailed in NATA's Policy Circular #6. It is important that once a suitable procedure has been established, NATA will need to assess the actual establishment of an annex laboratory to ensure that the procedure is followed and NATA's requirements are being met.

6. Corporate Accreditation

NATA's system of corporate accreditation (see details in NATA's Circular #1)

- removes duplication of system assessments
- permits recognition of multiple signatories at multiple sites
- provides management of the company with an organisational view of their operations
- provides a NATA client manager for a single point of contact.

Currently a number of companies are introducing standard quality systems throughout their organisations and are requesting multiple signatory approvals across multiple laboratories, single assessments of quality system documentation and a central notification person.

The above can only be provided under the corporate accreditation system within NATA. Non corporate accredited laboratories are covered accreditation by accreditation.

Please contact your local NATA office or look at the Policy Circular #1 on our web site.

7. The reassessment process

Those laboratories that have been reassessed recently will have become aware of the new process of reporting and notification by NATA. This process is detailed below:

- An interim Report on Assessment will be usually issued at the exit meeting at the end of the assessment visit;
- A confirmation letter will be sent to the laboratory with the Report on Assessment as soon as possible after the visit. This report is reviewed by the Chairman of the Accreditation Committee prior to the confirmation letter being sent. It can be expected that a few changes will be made in the report. However, laboratories should commence corrective action based on the interim report so that they can meet the agreed response date. You will be advised by telephone if significant changes are to be made to this report.
- Laboratories are expected to provide a complete response to all conditions and minor conditions by the agreed response date. If a response is not received by that date, a reminder letter is sent to the laboratory indicating that accreditation cannot be continued if a response is not received by the date indicated in the letter.
- If a response is not received by the final date, NATA will take action to suspend the accreditation.
- A satisfactory response to all conditions and minor conditions is required prior to a final report being prepared and sent to NATA's board representative to recommend continued accreditation or addition of signatories and tests.
 - **Please note: any additions to the scope of accreditation and signatories cannot be recommended until this is complete.**

- A notification letter confirming continued accreditation and additions to the scope of accreditation and signatory list will be sent when the report is approved by NATA's board representative.
- The times concerning NATA's response to each parts of this process are included in its Charter of Service.

If you need further details, please request them from the NATA staff at the entry/exit meeting at the reassessment.