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Laboratory Management Review (For Laboratory Directors and Supervisors)

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Introduction

A frequent comment from weights and measures directors and laboratory supervisors is that they would like to have a better understanding of the responsibilities, activities, and operation of the weights and measures laboratory. Each year NIST requests that each State laboratory wishing Recognition from OWM submit material for our review. A key part of each submission is the review by the laboratory's management review of the information and materials that are being submitted to NIST to better understand and provide input to the process on laboratory operation. Since a management review is a good practice to ensure ongoing communications with your laboratory staff, it is also a requirement of the quality standards published in NIST Handbook 143, Program Handbook.

We encourage metrologists to provide information to their laboratory management on an ongoing basis throughout the year and to review the entire program with their management at least once a year (as required in the program handbook). Monthly updates (via e-mail or short meetings) from the metrologist to the laboratory director provide an opportunity for periodic communications to ensure that your program is operating effectively to meet programmatic needs.

Metrologists are required to conduct periodic internal audits to evaluate their entire quality system and technical capabilities. At the 2002 Regional Measurement Assurance Program meetings, NIST is providing additional training for the laboratory staff on what constitutes a good "quality assessment" of the laboratory. This training addresses the internal auditing process and the laboratory management review.

A good time to perform the annual review is prior to the annual submission process of laboratory information to OWM (required between October 1 to November 15 each year). Another good time to discuss the laboratory operations is immediately after a metrologist attends OQWM training and after attendance at the regional metrology (RMAP) meetings where training is provided and the results of the round robins are discussed. If you aren't getting periodic updates from your staff, please schedule them! Two of the RMAP meetings have already been held this year.

What to Ask About

We often hear from directors that they aren't sure what to ask their metrologists. The suggested management review document in Handbook 143, Appendix C, Part 1, provides "an outline" for topics you can discuss. The purpose of this review is to make sure everyone is aware when progress is made or when great things have happened in the

laboratory program, and to identify those areas where progress and improvement are needed. For example, when standards need to be recalibrated, it is important that metrologists identify this need well in advance of the budget cycle.

The new laboratory quality system (which we will be incorporated into Handbook 143 this summer) contains the following list of topics for you to review:

1. The suitability of policies and procedures;
2. reports from managerial and supervisory personnel;
3. the outcome of recent internal audits;
4. corrective and preventive actions;
5. assessments by external bodies;
6. the results of interlaboratory comparisons or proficiency tests;
7. changes in the volume and type of work;
8. client feedback;
9. complaints; and
10. other relevant factors, such as quality control activities, resources and staff training.

At the RMAP meetings this year, OWM is conducting additional training on “traceability” and on “uncertainties.” One of the exercises provides individual laboratory feedback on the traceability hierarchy charts that were submitted during the last annual OWM review cycle. Results of the latest interlaboratory comparisons are also discussed. If your regional metrology meeting has already been held, these would be wonderful topics for management and metrologists to discuss.

Most Common Deficiencies

Based on evaluation and feedback on management reviews submitted in the past, many of them are simply used as checklists without a substantive review or detailed evaluation. Many have missing dates and signatures. Appendix C, Part 1 is considered an “outline only” and not a “form” to be completed. A complete review with corrective action, planned activities, and progress should be detailed for your laboratory records as well as for NIST’s annual review. During the 2002 submission cycle, NIST requested detailed information regarding the measurement traceability hierarchy of your measurement standards. After all of the RMAP meetings are completed this year, letters will be sent to each program regarding specific measurement traceability concerns. During the 2003 submission cycle, we OWM will be requesting much more detailed management reviews.

For More Information

The Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC) has a very good summary document called Management Review for Laboratories, TC 003. It is available on-line at the following Internet site:

http://www.ianz.govt.nz/aplac/documents/web_docs/APLACTC003.pdf

Other publications of interest may be found here as well:

<http://www.ianz.govt.nz/aplac/documents/published.htm>