



Development of a Comprehensive Standard for Environmental Laboratory Accreditation

The Institute for National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation (INELA) is a not-for-profit research and scientific voluntary consensus organization whose mission is to help maintain and promote a system for the accreditation of entities directly involved in the generation of environmental data. INELA has embarked on a new effort to establish a comprehensive standard for the accreditation of environmental laboratories.

The new INELA standard will consist of modules, designed to serve as stand-alone documents, each meeting the specific needs of a particular user group. For example, one such module could describe the process by which an organization seeks to obtain and maintain accreditation. Another module could describe the requirements that proficiency test providers must meet. This change will obviate the current need for every stakeholder group to extract information from multiple chapters, where the requirements of other stakeholders are interwoven.

The INELA standards are created in a consensus environment, involving all interests and stakeholder groups as described in Policies Governing Standards Development. These policies are posted on the INELA website (<http://www.inela.org>), and have been provided to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) with an application for recognition by ANSI as an Accredited Standards Developer. In order to become accredited by ANSI a voluntary consensus standards body must meet defined criteria, including balance of interest, lack of dominance, openness, and having an appeals process. INELA achieves:

- balance of interest through Expert Committees with representation from every stakeholder group, all with full and equal voting rights;
- lack of dominance through an Expert Committee structure that prevents any single interest category from dominating any committee;
- openness through unrestricted membership, allowing all INELA members to comment and provide input on any proposed standard, and debate proposed standards publicly; and
- consensus and due process by providing the right to vote and register written comments on every proposed standard to every member, and to provide the opportunity for members to reconsider and change their votes. The INELA Policies Governing Standards Development also includes an appeals process whereby any member whose negative vote has been found non-persuasive may submit a written appeal for formal consideration.

Standards development follows a systematic process that allows review and input by all affected stakeholders prior to voting on the final standards. The step-by-step process is summarized as follows:

- Each Expert Committee develops a working draft standard, and votes to release this document for publication and public debate at the INELA semiannual meeting.

- Following the semiannual meeting, any INELA member or member of the public may submit comments to the Expert Committee, which considers the comments and makes appropriate modifications, to produce a Draft Interim Standard (DIS).
- All Committee Members and Associate Committee Members are afforded the opportunity to vote on the DIS, and to accompany their votes with written comments. The DIS becomes the Interim Standard if it receives a two-thirds favorable vote by the Committee Members and if all comments are resolved.
- The Interim Standard, together with the written comments, is debated publicly at the next INELA semiannual meeting. Further changes to the Interim Standard are not permitted.
- All INELA members then have the opportunity to vote on the Interim Standard. If the vote is favorable, the Interim Standard becomes the INELA Final Standard, which is then available for use by any standards adoption organization, such as the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC).

The INELA standards development process has a distinct advantage over previous processes because the step-wise process allows ample time for members to consider the changes prior to voting, and affords members an additional opportunity to submit comments and have those comments resolved before the standard is accepted. This process will inevitably lead to a standard with fewer flaws, and hence, reduce the frequency by which further modifications to the standard will be required. INELA encourages anyone who is interested in this effort to join our organization and get involved in these efforts.

The next semiannual INELA meeting will be in Raleigh, North Carolina from August 10-12, 2005. More information about this meeting is on the INELA website at: <http://www.inela.org/Conferences/conferences.html>.