

**SUMMARY OF THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY ADVISORY BOARD MEETING**

**Teleconference: 866-299-3188/9195415544#**

**September 18, 2013; 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. EDT**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board (ELAB or Board) teleconference was held on September 18, 2013. The agenda for this meeting is provided as Attachment A, a list of the participants is provided as Attachment B, and action items from the teleconference are included as Attachment C. The official certification of the minutes by the Chair or Vice-Chair is included as Attachment D.

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

**1. OPENING REMARKS**

Ms. Lara Phelps, Designated Federal Official of ELAB, welcomed participants to the teleconference and explained that she would act as Chair for the meeting, as Ms. Patsy Root and Ms. Michelle Wade were unexpectedly unable to attend. Following this explanation, she called an official roll of the Board members and guests.

**2. APPROVAL OF AUGUST MINUTES**

Ms. Phelps asked whether any members had any comments regarding the August minutes; there were none. Mr. Dave Speis moved to accept the minutes without changes, and Dr. Mahesh Pujari seconded the motion. The Board approved the August minutes unanimously with no discussion. Dr. Dallas Wait asked whether there had been any comments regarding the methods harmony effort during the August meeting; the Board members and Ms. Phelps noted that comments were few, and no one recalled any specific comments on the methods harmony effort.

**3. NEW TASK GROUPS**

Ms. Phelps stated that the previous Workgroup structure had been successful, serving its purpose well for a long time. It is unfortunate that it had to be abandoned because of the misconduct of other Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) committees serving other agencies. Her perception is that the transition to the new Task Group format had not been as successful as the previous structure. She asked the ELAB members for their opinions, and if they did not think that it was working as smoothly as possible, whether they had any suggestions for improvement.

Mr. Phillips thought that the new system was less efficient because it necessitated an increased number of smaller meetings, and several topics cannot be dealt with on one call. A greater number of meetings has occurred, and coordination is a burden.

Dr. Pujari thought that small groups, such as those that worked on Methods 608, 624 and 625, worked well. He asked when these methods would be published in the *Federal Register*. Ms. Phelps responded that ELAB does not have the answer to that question.

Dr. Wait thought that the new structure has the potential to work well, but the responsibilities for leading the groups has been diluted from three to many people, which decreases the effectiveness of each group. Also, members now belong to more than one group, which increases time pressures for the members. During the first teleconference in July, only three of the six members of his Task Group attended, so the effort did not progress as far as he would have liked. He thought that the new structure dilutes the responsibilities too much. He was impressed with how the Task Group coordinated by Mr. Phillips was run, but he has not heard anything about the liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry (LC/MS/MS) effort. Dr. Pujari explained that he had been out of the country and had been unable to schedule a meeting to discuss the issue.

Mr. Speis thought that the new system also was a function of the origin of the issues; the characteristics of the issues have changed in that most of them used to come from within ELAB, whereas many of the current topics have been from external origins. As a result, the level of passion to work for solutions or recommendations is not present.

Dr. Richard Burrows said that leading a Task Group is work, and it is difficult to coordinate the members' schedules for meetings. He also noted that Board members should not volunteer to be Task Group leaders unless they truly are engaged and willing to put forth a significant amount of effort.

Ms. Phelps asked whether it would be helpful for a student contractor to help coordinate the meetings or whether it was possible to combine two or more topics to increase efficiency.

Mr. Farrell said that contractor assistance would be helpful. He noted that ELAB had asked EPA to identify issues on which the Board could work, and ELAB has received several "hot" issues; however, the Board needs more time to deal with external requests. He suggested rotating each of the topics monthly at Board meetings, with the Task Group leading a discussion of the entire Board. He thought that ELAB needed to give the Task Group structure some more time as this is a busy season, and all of the Board members have many commitments.

Dr. Michael Wichman agreed that it was difficult to schedule multiple meetings because of the number of Task Groups on which each member now sits. Ms. Ruth Forman thought that tasks should be prioritized. Ms. Silky Labie agreed that it is difficult to schedule meetings and that prioritization would be helpful. Ms. Patricia Carvajal also agreed with all of the points that had been made, particularly regarding time constraints for attending multiple meetings; prioritizing the topics definitely would be helpful.

Ms. Phelps said that she wanted to provide as much support as possible. She expressed her frustration that the Board must deal with this new situation through no fault of its own, particularly because the increased meeting burden on the ELAB members is not fair. Everyone is busy, and some months will be busier than others, but there must be a way to move forward and be productive. Although the Board cannot establish standing workgroups, it is important to recognize that there are subgroups within ELAB with certain expertise regarding the various topics; if the Board can find efficiencies within these groups, several topics under each area of expertise can be addressed. She also supports prioritizing topics and developing a more manageable list. She would like to see three Task Groups, each with a good combination of expertise that can address multiple topics. When it is necessary to deal with one topic at a time, it still will be possible through the Task Group structure. She wants to identify the best method(s)

to increase functionality, recognizing that all Board members will be busy throughout the year. She wondered whether there is a better, technical method to group the topics/issues for the Task Groups while staying outside of the previous Workgroup structure.

Ms. Forman recommended examining the topics that each ELAB member was assigned to so that commonalities could be identified, allowing the topics to be organized in groups. Ms. Phelps supported this idea and volunteered to be the administrative contact to set up the various Task Group meetings. She will provide support as much as possible, including contractor support, to ease the burden on Task Group leaders and members. Mr. Farrell reiterated that the support would be helpful, particularly if the tasks are prioritized, so that the Task Groups are focused on the issues at hand rather than administrative issues and can accomplish the necessary work.

Dr. Wichman asked whether the list of the current Task Groups and their members were published on the ELAB website. Ms. Phelps said that the list had not been posted on the website, but if the Board determines that it would like to post it, she will ensure that it is published. Mr. Phillips made a motion to publish the current Task Group list to the ELAB website, which Dr. Wichman seconded. The Board unanimously approved the motion.

Dr. Wichman reported that the Workgroups still are listed on the main page of the Board's website. Ms. Phelps said that there are several issues that she has been trying to address regarding the website; however, all Office of Science Advisor websites have been chosen to be migrated into the new system and are being translated into Drupal. Any requests that are considered "structural," which includes the website issues she has been trying to address, have been deprioritized until the migration is complete.

Mr. Farrell thought that the helium issue needed to be prioritized. He thought that the methods efforts that Dr. Burrows had headed up could be combined with the method harmonization effort. Mr. Phillips noted that some tasks have timeline drivers, whereas others do not.

Dr. Wichman reported that the Task Group devoted to qPCR for Recreational Water Quality Criteria was trying to meet with Dr. Robin Oshiro (EPA) about several issues regarding implementation of the method, including training, auditing and method validation. Ms. Forman added that the Task Group's messages had not been understood, so a teleconference with EPA staff would resolve the confusion.

Mr. Speis reported that the Task Group working on the helium issue had developed an outline regarding next steps, and the members are beginning to work on them. A draft will be available in time for the next Board meeting. The recommendation will be that EPA may have to take additional action to use hydrogen in certain circumstances, as 40 CFR 136 Part 6 is not sufficient as is. Dr. Pujari commented that hydrogen can be used in some but not all methods, and it is necessary to validate methods. Mr. Speis said that the recommendation would not include a level of detail regarding how EPA should validate methods. Dr. Burrows reported that the strategic Federal Helium Reserve (also known as the National Helium Reserve) will be closing in October, and the Bureau of Land Management will begin shutting down operations on October 1, 2013, unless Congress takes action. He remains hopeful that Congress will act. Mr. Speis said that the Helium Stewardship Act is on the Senate agenda, but he is not aware of any timeframe associated with Senate discussion of the bill.

Mr. Phillips asked whether helium recovery systems were or could be installed for certain technologies. Dr. Burrows thought that helium recovery was technically feasible but would not be in place by October.

Ms. Labie said that in terms of the Interagency Data Quality Task Force (IDQTF) issue, the goal is to increase laboratory involvement in the data quality objective process; laboratories had been supportive of this idea at ELAB's recent face-to-face meeting. She did not think that this was a topic that needed to be prioritized. She spoke to several members of the IDQTF, but none were aware of the identity of the IDQTF Chair; they promised to find out and contact Ms. Labie, but she has not heard from them.

Dr. Pujari explained that in terms of the LC/MS/MS issue, he has performed some research and found that some of the detection limits are questionable, and there is neither information nor sufficient examples to demonstrate that the methods are working. He has not been able to convene the Task Group but hopes to report more progress during the Board's October teleconference.

Dr. Dallas Wait reiterated that the Task Group devoted to methods harmony had held its first teleconference in July but was not able to proceed without the majority of the group present; he will schedule a teleconference with the group shortly. Ms. Phelps reiterated that she was available to help schedule any meetings.

Mr. John Philips said that the Task Group devoted to the method detection limit (MDL) issue had met on September 6, 2013, during which the history of the prior Workgroup's efforts was discussed. The new TNI procedure was provided to the group members, who are reviewing it. He will convene another teleconference for the members to discuss their thoughts on the proposal before developing any next steps or recommendations. These thoughts will be shared with all ELAB members to discuss in more detail during the next Board meeting. There is an Agency meeting on October 30, 2013, to discuss the proposed revisions; he would like to attend this meeting before making a decision regarding whether establishing a stakeholder review group will meet EPA's needs and expectations.

#### **4. NEW TOPICS/ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

Mr. Farrell thought that there had been significant discussion about the competency policies that the Forum on Environmental Measurements released, and much of it has been positive, with some focus on implementation and other potential issues. He wondered whether ELAB should examine the issue and determine whether it can take action to help reinforce the progress from the laboratory, field sampling and measurement standpoints. Ms. Phelps said that she could make the presentation about the policies during the October Board meeting if there is interest. Mr. Farrell thought that there were many ramifications, and ELAB's expertise could help EPA with clarification or implementation. The Board members agreed that they would like to hear the presentation during the October meeting.

The Board members and Ms. Phelps discussed the successful completion of the chlorinated ethers effort, noting that it was completed in a short amount of time. Several EPA offices also consider it a successful effort as well, as they were in a position to take positive efforts quickly. Mr. Speis had been surprised by the response of the Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics,

and Ms. Phelps explained that it had been a function of the office's normal operating procedures in terms of its responsibilities for toxic compounds. Also, the staff member assigned to respond had not been privy to prior discussions on the topic.

Mr. Speis said that Ms. Kim Kirkland (EPA) had approached him to determine whether ELAB was willing to provide a review of some methods the Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery is considering. The goal is to obtain the Board's input before the methods are released to the public docket to preempt any concerns that the environmental laboratory community might raise.

Ms. Forman asked whether the Task Groups devoted to Methods 608, 624 and 625 would be dissolved. Ms. Phelps thought that the group could be recognized as intact for a reasonable statutory limit of time, and if there is nothing further from the Office of Water, then the Board can consider the Task Groups disbanded. Ms. Forman thought that given the substantial number of comments that ELAB had submitted, it might be helpful to contact Dr. Lem Walker (EPA) regarding an appropriate timeframe. Ms. Phelps will contact Dr. Walker. Mr. Phillips reported that Dr. Walker had said that ELAB was only one group to provide comments; therefore, it could be inferred that the office had obtained input from various perspectives and was less interested in an ongoing dialogue.

Dr. Wait asked about the EPA quality system and promised forthcoming changes. Ms. Phelps replied that these changes were not going to occur, but she did not want to provide an unofficial status update when quality staff in Office of Environmental Information are developing statements that will provide an update about the topic. More details will be forthcoming, but essentially the changes were halted because of public feedback that the streamlining would not have the intended impacts. Ms. Phelps clarified for Dr. Wait that the G4 and G5 documents still are in existence as applicable guidance documents.

## **5. WRAP-UP/REVIEW ACTION ITEMS**

Ms. Phelps explained that the end of the Agency fiscal year is September 30, 2013, and part of her obligation is reporting the activities of the FACA committees for which she is responsible for via the FACA database. Information submitted in the report includes a variety of topics, such as current Board members, charter status, deliverables and accomplishments, and so forth. The report on all FACA committees throughout the government will be available by the end of the calendar year. She congratulated ELAB for all of its accomplishments during this fiscal year.

Ms. Kristen LeBaron reviewed the action items identified during the meeting, which are included in Attachment C. Dr. Wait asked for confirmation that the current Task Group structure would not change. Ms. Phelps agreed and said that the Board had not come to a definitive decision about how to proceed. She introduced the topic so that ELAB could consider possible solutions, and the discussion will be revisited during the October Board meeting to determine whether any fundamental changes will be made. She will provide as much support as possible.

## **6. CLOSING REMARKS/ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Forman made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which Mr. Speis seconded and the Board approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

## **Attachment A**

### **AGENDA ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY ADVISORY BOARD**

Monthly Teleconference: 866-299-3188/9195415544#

September 18, 2013; 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. (EDT)

Opening Remarks	Phelps/Root
Approval of June Minutes	Root
New Task Groups	Phelps/All
qPCR in Recreational Water Testing: QA/QC Issues and Method Implementation for Auditors and Laboratories	Root
Conversion From Helium to Hydrogen as a Carrier Gas in Various EPA-Approved Methods	Wade
Interagency Data Quality Task Force/Data Quality Objectives Process	Labie
Liquid Chromatography With Tandem Mass Spectrometry	Pujari
Methods Harmony	Wait
Method Detection Limit (MDL)/Revision of 40 CFR Part 136 Appendix B	Phillips
New Topics/Issues for Consideration	Root
Wrap-Up/Review Action Items	Root/LeBaron
Closing Remarks/Adjourn	Phelps/Root

**Attachment B****MEMBERSHIP LISTING AND GUESTS****ELAB TELECONFERENCE****September 18, 2013; 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EDT**

<b>Attendance (Y/N)</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
N	Ms. Patsy Root (Chair)	IDEXX Laboratories, Inc. Representing: Laboratory Product Developers
N	Ms. Michelle L. Wade (Vice-Chair)	Kansas Department of Health and the Environment Representing: Laboratory Accreditation Bodies
Y	Ms. Lara P. Phelps, DFO	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Representing: EPA
Y	Dr. Richard Burrows	TestAmerica Laboratories, Inc. Representing: Commercial Laboratory Industry
Y	Ms. Patricia M. Carvajal	San Antonio River Authority Representing: Watershed/Restoration
Y	Mr. John (Jack) E. Farrell, III	Analytical Excellence, Inc. Representing: The NELAC Institute (TNI)
Y	Ms. Ruth L. Forman	Environmental Standards, Inc. Representing: Large Third-Party Assessors
Y	Ms. Sylvia (Silky) S. Labie	Environmental Laboratory Consulting & Technology, LLC Representing: Third Party Assessors
N	Ms. Susan L. Mazur	Florida Power and Light Representing: Utility Water Act Group
Y	Mr. John H. Phillips	Ford Motor Company Representing: Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers
Y	Dr. Mahesh P. Pujari	City of Los Angeles Representing: National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA)
N	Dr. James (Jim) N. Seiber	University of California, Davis Representing: Academic and Research Communities
N	Ms. Aurora Shields	City of Lawrence, Kansas Representing: Wastewater Laboratories
Y	Mr. David (Dave) N. Speis	QC Laboratories Representing: American Council of Independent Laboratories (ACIL)
Y	Dr. A. Dallas Wait	Gradient Representing: Consumer Products Industry
Y	Dr. Michael D. Wichman	State Hygienic Laboratory at the University of Iowa Representing: Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL)



<b>Attendance (Y/N)</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Y	Ms. Kristen LeBaron (Contractor)	The Scientific Consulting Group, Inc. (SCG)
Y	Ms. Lynn Bradley (Guest)	TNI
Y	Ms. Paula Hogg (Guest)	Hampton Roads Sanitation Department
Y	Mr. Stuart Magoon (Guest)	City of Tacoma, Washington
Y	Ms. Elizabeth Turner (Guest)	North Texas Municipal Water District

## **Attachment C**

### **ACTION ITEMS**

1. Ms. LeBaron will finalize the August 2013 meeting minutes and send them to Ms. Phelps via email.
2. Ms. Phelps will request that appropriate EPA staff publish the Task Group list to the ELAB website.
3. The Board members will consider methods to increase the efficiency of the Task Groups and prioritize tasks and will revisit the topic during the October ELAB meeting; in the meantime, the Task Groups will continue to function as they have.
4. Ms. Phelps will contact Dr. Walker to determine the expected timeframe for retiring the Methods 608, 624 and 625 Task Groups.

## Attachment D

I hereby certify that this is the final version of the minutes for the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board Meeting held on September 18, 2013.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Root", is positioned above a horizontal line.

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Signature Chair

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Ms. Patsy Root

Print Name Chair