United States Environmental Protection Agency

ERLN Overview

Environmental Response Laboratory Network (ERLN)

Learn More at www.epa.gov/erln

EPA established the Environmental Response Laboratory Network (ERLN) to assist in addressing chemical, biological, and radiological threats during nationally significant incidents. The ERLN is managed by EPA's Office of Emergency Management and serves as a national network of laboratories that can be accessed as needed to support large scale environmental responses by providing consistent analytical capabilities, capacities, and quality data in a systematic, coordinated response. The ERLN integrates capabilities of existing public sector laboratories with accredited private sector labs to support environmental responses.

Mission

To provide Federal, State and local decision-makers with reliable, high quality analytical data used to identify chemical, biological, and radiological contaminants collected in support of response and cleanup activities.

Goals

- Provide environmental laboratory testing capability and capacity to meet EPA's responsibilities for surveillance, response, decontamination, and recovery from incidents involving release of chemical, biological, or radiological contaminants;
- Facilitate coordination of laboratories capable of responding efficiently and effectively to incidents; and
- Establish relationships and priorities with other federal laboratory networks through the Integrated Consortium of Laboratory Networks (ICLN) in preparation for a major environmental event. ICLN is a system of laboratory networks that provides timely, high-quality, and interpretable results for early detection and effective consequence management of acts of terrorism or other disasters.

Membership Criteria

Participation in the ERLN is based on a laboratory's ability to meet ERLN's core requirements, which apply to both public and private laboratories. Each laboratory must establish, maintain, and demonstrate:

- A quality system consistent with ISO 17025, The NELAC Institute , or Drinking Water Certification (as applicable);
- Documented policies and procedures;
- Sample management systems;
- Facilities for sample handling and secure storage;
- Data management and exchange procedures; and
- Analytical capabilities and capacities for chemical, biological, and radiological contaminants.

Benefits of ERLN Membership

Training and Exercise Opportunities

ERLN training and exercises enable your laboratory to network with professionals from other laboratories across the nation. Hands-on experience will increase your laboratory's capabilities and ensure that your laboratory personnel are familiar with ERLN procedures. The ERLN also offers opportunities to participate in method development studies.

Recognition as a Homeland Security Asset

The ERLN is a laboratory network established to help the country respond to environmental emergencies and provide public confidence that contaminants will be identified and safely removed. As a member of the ERLN, your laboratory will be pivotal in improving our national security.

Improved Communications with Member Laboratories

Improved communications with member laboratories helps to address emerging analytical, laboratory security, or laboratory operation challenges. The ERLN facilitates interaction among member laboratories across the nation to increase learning opportunities and coordination by providing a uniform framework for sample management, analysis, and data delivery. For example, members will have access to an online ERLN *Collaborative Workspace* where they can share information on a regular basis outside of scheduled exercises and training sessions.

ICLN Support

As part of the ICLN, the ERLN coordinates with multiple Department of Homeland Security (DHS) offices, providing a broad spectrum of expertise and resources.

Contact Information

ERLN Help Desk
erln_helpdesk@epa.gov
703.818.4200

October 2009

Laboratory Compendium

All laboratories accepted into the ERLN are required to register and maintain a laboratory record in the EPA Laboratory Compendium. The Compendium is a limited-access database on analytical capabilities and capacities of EPA, Federal, State, local, commercial, and private laboratories.

To access the Laboratory Compendium, please visit ***http://www.epa.gov/compendium*** (Factsheet is available at www.epa.gov/erln)

Application Process

Laboratories applying for membership must complete the following requirements:

- Review ERLN Laboratory Requirements and Policy for Membership;
- Complete ERLN application;
- Provide supporting documentation with the application such as accreditation qualifications; certificates from accrediting authorities; plans and procedures for sample management, handling, and storage; laboratory affiliations; memberships; and other related support documentation;
- Read and sign the Acknowledgement of Laboratory Responsibilities checklist; and
- Register in the EPA Laboratory Compendium.

Admission into the ERLN is based on review of the application package. The laboratory will be notified by EPA of their membership status within sixty (60) days of receipt of the completed application.

ERLN Member Responsibilities

If an ERLN member is contacted to provide services in an emergency, the laboratory may choose whether or not to provide services. In the event of such an emergency, EPA will send project specifications for review. If a member wants to provide services, the lab should inform EPA of what support it can provide. If a laboratory can support the project and chooses to provide services, then it is expected to meet the requirements of the project specification. Specific responsibilities may include:

- Supplying analyses for the isolation, detection, and quantitative measurement of biological, chemical, and radiological contaminants in samples collected in support of environmental responses;
- Adhering to the methods and technical requirements specified in the project-specific order when testing ERLN samples and reporting results;
- Reporting positive or suspect test results to authorized ERLN personnel within the timeframe specified;
- Possessing and have operational all necessary measurement and testing equipment required to perform the applicable test as specified in the methods reference in the project-specific order, prior to receipt of samples; and
- Observing any data transmission requirements noted in the project-specific Task Order. Requirements may include a unique data package for each data reporting group, a specific format (computer-readable, PDF, hardcopy), or specified timeframe.

Note: Requirements are detailed in their entirety in the ERLN Laboratory Requirements document.

Reimbursement

Interagency Agreements are used to reimburse Federal laboratories for their services in the ERLN. A Basic Ordering Agreement (BOA) will be the primary mechanism for funding private and non-federal, public laboratories. If a non-federal, public laboratory is not capable of entering into a BOA with EPA, or a laboratory provides other services to support a response, other appropriate reimbursement mechanisms will be evaluated, as needed. For more information on BOAs, please visit the ERLN Web site at www.epa.gov/erln.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will there be on-site audits?

The ERLN reserves the right to conduct on-site audits at any time, but they are usually done only as needed. In most instances, the ERLN program office will request the results of previous audits to minimize disruption to laboratory operations. When required, ERLN on-site laboratory evaluations are carried out to monitor the laboratory's ability to provide required analytical services. If a laboratory doesn't have any accreditation or certification and submits a quality management checklist to document a quality system, EPA may audit the laboratory to verify the information. This verification includes an analytical system evaluation and/or an evidentiary system evaluation. It is intended to confirm the laboratory's quality system(s) and will not have any other consequences.

Do I have to participate in exercises as a member lab?

No, exercises are voluntary, but the benefits of exercise participation are substantial. Exercises assist in understanding many aspects of the overall process. Your laboratory participants will gain valuable hands-on experience and build personal relationships with other lab personnel.

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