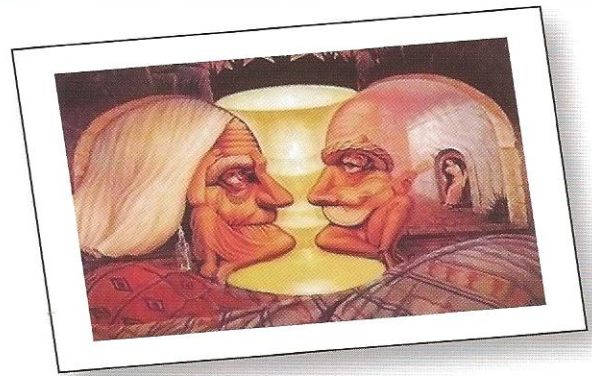


The difference between laboratories is not what you see but what you don't see



When selecting a laboratory for your testing needs you need to be certain that they will provide you with reliable results. How do you do this when you aren't familiar with them or their competency? What are the things that you need to assess and how do you do that? The technical competency of a laboratory depends on a range of factors, such as:

- Qualifications — the training and experience of their staff**
- Equipment — that it's suitable, maintained and calibrated properly**
- Quality — that they have proper quality assurance and procedures in place**
- Sampling — collection & delivery to protect the integrity of samples**
- Reporting — accurate recording and reporting systems to verify the data**
- Environment — an appropriate facility to perform their types of testing**

A supplier can say that they have all of these things but again how do you verify that its true. You could try and evaluate the service yourself but unless you have sufficient knowledge and time this wont provide you with the proper confidence.

What if the supplier has ISO 9000 Certification or similar. This standard is widely used in manufacturing and service industries to evaluate their management systems and the quality of their product or services. ISO 9000 is an effective management evaluation tool but it does not evaluate the technical competence of a supplier. This means that the evaluation of a supplier against ISO 9000 does not assure you that the test and sampling data is accurate and/or reliable. As a means of independently evaluating laboratory competence throughout the world many countries now depend on a process called Laboratory Accreditation. Australia has a nationally recognised laboratory accreditation system called the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) and Malaysia has Skim Akreditasi Makmal Malaysia (SAMM) that evaluates facilities in all areas of testing, inspection and calibration. Unlike ISO 9000 certification, NATA and/or SAMM accreditation uses criteria and procedures specifically developed to determine technical competence. Specialist technical assessors conduct a thorough evaluation of all factors in a laboratory that effect the production of technical data. The criteria are based on an international standard called ISO/IEC 17025 which is used for evaluating laboratories throughout the world. These standards are specifically to assess factors relevant to a laboratories ability to produce precise, reliable test data including:

- The technical competence of staff;
- The validity and appropriateness of the methods;
- Traceability of measurements and calibrations to national standards;
- Appropriate application of measurement uncertainty;
- The suitability, calibration, and maintenance of test equipment;
- The testing environment;
- The sampling, handling, and transportation of test items;
- Quality assurance of test inspection or calibration data.

NATA accreditation also covers the relevant quality systems elements addressed in ISO 9000; 1994 certification. To ensure continued compliance, accredited facilities are regularly re-examined to ensure that they maintain their standards of technical expertise. Facilities are also required to participate in regular proficiency testing programmes as an on going demonstration of their competence. IMC participates in these ongoing proficiency testing programmes with excellent results.

Talk to us about all your Consulting, Training, Laboratory testing, and Sampling needs for water, food, environmental, industrial hygiene, and more.....ring 1300 131 405

