

2012 SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA ACCREDITED LABORATORIES

Conducted by:
ACIL – ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES SECTION

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Purpose

- To obtain feedback from ELAP customers to inform discussions and craft proposals for changes in regulations and practices at ELAP

Laboratory Type

Type of Laboratory (Check all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Commercial	32.9%	54
Municipal	26.8%	44
Water Supply	11.6%	19
Public Health	9.8%	16
Research Oriented	2.4%	4
Federal/State or Local Government	19.5%	32
Private Industrial Lab (non-commercial)	10.4%	17
Other (please specify)	6.7%	11
<i>answered question</i>		164

*** Majority (67.1%) of respondents are smaller municipal and public sector labs**

Laboratory Size

Laboratory Size (For your location only)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1-2 employees	22.0%	36
3-5 employees	23.2%	38
6-10 employees	13.4%	22
11 - 25 employees	11.6%	19
26 - 50 employees	14.0%	23
51 - 100 employees	11.0%	18
101 - 150 employees	1.2%	2
150 - 250 employees	3.0%	5
>250 employees	0.6%	1
<i>answered question</i>		164

* **58% of respondents have <10 employees**

Total Certifications

Current certifications/accreditations. Check only those that apply to your facility, please.

Answer Options	Accredited:	Response Count	
CA ELAP Drinking Water Accreditation	98	98	62%
CA ELAP Non-Potable and/or Solid and Chem Waste Accreditation	105	105	
NELAP (National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program)	35	35	21%
ISO 17025 via ILAC Signatory Accreditor	20	20	12%
AIHA (American Industrial Hygiene Association)	9	9	
Private/3rd party Accreditor, ie: A2LA, LAB, ACLASS, Perry Johnson, etc.	19	19	
Federal Government (e.g. DOD, DOE, USGS, etc)	16	16	10%
Other Certification/Accreditation - Not listed (Please specify below)	19	19	
If "Other" above is checked, please specify:		23	
		<i>answered question</i>	164

Samples Analyzed

What types of environmental samples do you analyze? (Please check all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Potable Water (Drinking Water)	64.6%	106
Non-potable (ie: Waste Water - NPDES, groundwater, etc.)	87.2%	143
Soils and other solids	45.1%	74
Air	18.3%	30
Tissue	11.6%	19
Other (please specify)	7.3%	12
<i>answered question</i>		164

Type of Testing

What type of testing do you perform? (Please check all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Asbestos	4.9%	8
Aquatic Toxicity	18.3%	30
Chemical	79.9%	131
Microbiological	66.5%	109
Radiochemical	9.1%	15
Specialty (ie: Dioxin)	7.3%	12
Toxicological (ie: Industrial Hygiene)	6.1%	10
Other (please specify)	7.9%	13

answered question

164

Origin of Accreditation

Under what program does California provide primary accreditation services for your laboratory?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
ELAP	81.4% *	131
NELAP	10.6%	17
CA does not provide primary accreditation services for this lab. We use ELAP to license our laboratory to do business in California under NELAP	2.5%	4
CA does not provide primary accreditation services for this lab. We have secondary accreditation via NELAP	5.6%	9
Other (please specify)		2
<i>answered question</i>		161

*** Majority of labs are ELAP**

Origin of Accreditation

How long has your laboratory been accredited by CA ELAP?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 1 year	2.5%	4
1-2 years	1.2%	2
3-5 years	3.7%	6
6-10 years	13.7%	22
Greater than 10 years	77.0% *	124
Not Applicable	1.9%	3
Other (please specify)		1
<i>answered question</i>		161

*** Majority of labs have been in the program for >10 years**

Other Accreditations

Is your lab accredited to perform drinking water testing and/or environmental testing by another private (3rd party) or public sector (other state or government) Accrediting Body (AB)?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	27.5%	44
No	72.5% *	116
<i>answered question</i>		160

* **Majority of labs are CA ELAP Program Only, but a significant number hold multiple accreditations from other AB's**

Comparison

If your lab is accredited by another Accreditation Body (AB) such as 3rd Party, other state, or other agency; How would you rate CA ELAP's overall technical competence and customer service when compared to the other Accreditation Body(s) that provide accreditation services for your laboratory?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
CA ELAP/NELAP program is Better	3.3%	3
CA ELAP/NELAP program is Worse	16.7%	15
No perceived difference	25.6%	23
CA ELAP is our only accreditor	54.4%	49
Comment:		13
<i>answered question</i>		90

*** 17% of labs holding multiple accreditation's believe ELAP services are worse than their alternative AB**

Comparison – Comments

Most comments cite specific issues with service, timeliness, and assessors:

1. Technical competence is assessor dependent
2. The level of technical experience can vary within agencies and auditors. My experience with CA ELAP is that often the **opinions of the auditors are not based on either technical expertise or standards/guidance documents.**
3. The audit initially kept getting canceled and then once it occurred, was very disorganized and difficult to discern what the issues truly were. In addition, the report was issued very late and provided only 6 days for a response.
4. It is difficult to get in contact with someone when questions arise. The audits that we have had over the past few years have not been worth the expense. We were scheduled to have an audit this year but it was cancelled because the Governor would not authorize the funds.
5. Auditors often seem unfamiliar with the methods included in the assessment.
6. Was called by a CA ELAP application processor this year and spoken to disrespectfully. The individual was wrong about a perceived error and uninterested in communicating constructively. I have been unable to get a response from emails or voice messages regarding accreditation questions.
7. We are not accredited by a 3rd party for environmental samples, but we are for other chemical analyses. The 3rd party accreditation program is much more value-added.
8. Several certification rounds required that we send the electronic file multiple times after receiving e-mails saying that we had not sent it at all. On occasion, when we've been contacted for additional information and the person calling has been very close to being rude.

Fee Increase

Would you support an increase in ELAP fees if they “requested” one? Please select all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, the services ELAP provides are valuable	17.4%	26
Yes, although I would like to see some improvements in their services for the additional fees	30.9%	46
No, ELAP’s fees are already too high	32.9%	49
No, there is little value to the current service	15.4%	23
No, there is no value to the current service	3.4%	5
Comment:		23
<i>answered question</i>		149

***82 % of responding labs believe ELAP services, at current levels, are priced too high**

Fee Increase – Comments I

- 3 commenters stated their exemption to fees, due to they are government labs
- I would only support higher fees if they could justify the need.
- Fees are on the high end compared to 49 states including Puerto Rico.
- ELAP fees should only be raised if cost of ELAP has risen.
- We really have no control over fee increases. If higher fees are imposed, we have to pay the higher fees since all of our other accreditations require us to have CA NELAP accreditation.
- We are proud to have ELAP Accreditation, but the fees are sometimes difficult for us to maintain as we are a small laboratory.
- Really no choice. We are required to have accreditation. I would like to see the secondary accreditation through NELAP fees come down more in-line with the fees for secondary accreditation through our State accreditation. I've never understood the different fee structure for the two.
- We police ourselves/are very morally committed to be the best possible in all ways. ELAP has required some unimportant testing which takes a great deal of time when these requirements are unessential. You never know what they are going to require. It all depends on what each individual inspector's forte has been. If you disagree with one of them they just make life more difficult for you.
- We are likely going to drop most if not all California certification for our lab.
- Because my lab does work in CA, I would have no choice but to pay the fees.

Fee Increase – Comments II

- The services that ELAP provides are valuable, and we would support an increase in ELAP fees in the hope that additional funding would increase staff size and then improve the services.
- Yes, if it produces improvement in service
- Possibly. It would depend what the increase in fees was going to be used for.
- With the state budget in poor shape I do feel it will be hard to do much more. They are auditing every other because of budget issues.
- ELAP inspector not very knowledgeable about laboratory testing, only about obscure regulatory details. Inspector fell asleep during audit, asked questions I had already answered as if s/he had not registered what I had said. Did not understand the concept of equivalent methods and chemistries. Did not seem to understand appropriate LFB and LFM spike levels. Had difficulty understanding the auditor's questions and statements (language barrier?)
- There really should be a choice for maintaining the status quo (ie service is okay, fees are okay)
- Within reason. Every agencies budget is tight, but ELAP provides important services to labs.
- This is not really a meaningful questions because we must maintain accreditation in order to perform work originating in the state of California. The services for which we currently pay fees are often not performed in a timely manner.
- The secondary accreditation process is a prime example of government waste. A TNI certificate should simply be recognized by all TNI AB's. Filling out and reviewing secondary application paperwork has no meaningful value.
- Fees are much higher than other similar NELAP secondary. No technical service is provided. No value in paying such extreme costs for secondary accreditation.
- Public Health labs are non-profit, so are exempt from laboratory fees

Fee Value

CA ELAP is a fee supported government agency. Overall, do you feel ELAP fees are appropriate for the services they offer. Please select all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, CA ELAP provides good value	33.8%	49
Yes, But improvements are necessary	35.2%	51
No, The fees are inappropriate. CA ELAP does not provide good value for the money	21.4%	31
No, The fees are inappropriate. Private sector (3rd party) alternatives appear to be more efficient and effective	5.5%	8
No, The fees are inappropriate. Other options should be considered. (Please specify below)	6.9%	10
Comment:		28
<i>answered question</i>		145
<i>skipped question</i>		19

- * **35.2 % believe improvements are necessary**
- * **33.8 % believe the fees are inappropriate for the level of service**

Overall Service

How would you rate CA-ELAP's overall customer service? (Select only one answer, please)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent, exceeds my expectations	6.0%	9
Good, meets my expectations	50.3%	76
Poor, meets some expectations, missed others	34.4%	52
Unacceptable, the ELAP staff does not appear to be service minded, thus our needs seem unimportant.	6.6%	10
Other - Please specify below.	2.6%	4
Other (comment):		20
<i>answered question</i>		151
<i>skipped question</i>		13

- * **56.3 Favorable**
- * **43.6 Unfavorable**

Overall Service Comments

Commenters Cite Issues with the following:

- **Inconsistent requirements for each inspection**
- **Assessor's vary a lot regarding time spent and area of focus**
- **Many have difficulty getting someone to answer the phone**
- **Reports are not sent in a timely manner, if sent at all**
- **Assessment renewals are not completed on time; this makes it very difficult to maintain reciprocal certifications elsewhere.**
- **Overall management issues: scheduling, timeliness, phone service, general communication**
- **Some deficiencies seem to have no citable basis to method or standard.**
- **Level of on-site service is dependent upon the Assessor: some are excellent, others are very poor.**

Technical Assistance

Other than validating compliance to standards of lab practices, do ELAP assessors provide technical assistance or resources to help your laboratory improve performance?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, they definitely help us improve our process and procedures	21.9%	32
Yes, they provide some value in some areas/functions	42.5%	62
No, they do not provide much value beyond compliance assessment	29.5%	43
Absolutely not, ELAP assessors provide no value to our laboratory systems or processes.	6.2%	9
Other (please specify)		16
	<i>answered question</i>	146
	<i>skipped question</i>	18

- * **22% Believe ELAP helps improve process**
- * **36% Believe that ELAP offers little value**

General Technical Assistance Comments

16 Commenters Cite Issues with the following:

- **Assessor's do not always have the expertise for the area in question**
- **The response time for technical issues is too slow**
- **Assessors are helpful regarding the successful use of new technology and how well it is being deployed in other labs.**
- **Reports sometimes contain minor or unrelated comments, when no other compliance issues can be found.**
- **Technical assistance is very assessor dependent: some are helpful, some are not.**

Accreditation Services

If CA ELAP provided accreditation services for your laboratory in the last 3 years, please answer the following questions:

Answer Options	Yes	No	Response Count
Did the ELAP laboratory assessor provide a clear agenda and schedule for the onsite assessment?	101	33	134
Did the exit meeting match the written laboratory assessment report?	104	27	131
Did the assessor appear sufficiently knowledgeable to assess the areas of the lab they were assessing?	108	27	135
Did the assessor create findings that were based more on personal preference or opinion than recognized standards of the testing industry?	61	70	131
Did the assessor complete the written laboratory assessment report within 30 days of completing the onsite assessment?	106	28	134
Overall, did you find the onsite assessment helpful in improving the QA/QC of your laboratory operations?	91	43	134
Additional comments:			31
	<i>answered question</i>		135

* ~ 76% are satisfied with specific services

* 47% believe that not all findings are justified.

Accreditation Services Comments

31 Commenters Cite Issues with the following:

- Not getting the report
- Some assessors are much worse than others.
- (3) Laboratories complained that they never received an assessment report.
- Some findings are picky while others are completely wrong
- Had to remind ELAP that the assessment is due. Scheduling is an issue.
- Audit value is very assessor dependent: some are helpful, some are not.
- Assessors do not always have good knowledge of the methods

Unclear Findings

When the origin of a finding is unclear or unfounded, do you feel comfortable discussing the issue with ELAP or assessors?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, ELAP encourages discussion and feedback where findings are unclear	55.0%	72
Yes, but we are cautious and consider the possibility of retaliation.	32.1%	42
No, ELAP or the assessors are not approachable.	6.1%	8
No, Anytime we question ELAP we suffer some type of consequence	3.1%	4
No, We are afraid of possible retaliation	3.8%	5
Other (please specify)		21
<i>answered question</i>		131

- * **55% Feel encourage to discuss with ELAP**
- * **32% Are cautious**
- * **13% Feel that ELAP is unapproachable**

Unclear Findings - Comments

21 Commenters Cite Issues with the following:

- Discussions are usually unsuccessful
- You must be on very solid ground to dispute a finding.
- It is difficult to reach our assessor
- We typically know more than the auditors
- Many times the assessor can not relate the finding to the requirement
- We are not afraid to ask, but we often get extremely vague answers.
- We don't feel like they encourage discussion, but I don't believe that they will retaliate either.
- (2) Laboratories feel subjected to extreme retaliation

Audit Frequency

How do you feel about the frequency of on site laboratory assessments?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
We would prefer that ELAP perform more onsite assessments of our lab	1.4%	2
We are happy with the current frequency of laboratory assessments	64.5%	89
We would prefer fewer lab assessments and longer intervals between accreditation events	34.1%	47
Other (please specify)		20
<i>answered question</i>		138

*** 64.5% Are happy with the current frequency**

Audit Frequency – Comments I

20 Commenters Cite the following:

- There should be an incentive for laboratories that perform and comply well by longer audit intervals and for those mediocre laboratories, audits should be more frequent. After all, the goal is to have all laboratories in the same performance level.
- Our last NELAC audit was in 2009. I have not been notified when my next audit will be. Biennial audits are good but we are not getting them (as required). This is causing problems getting reciprocity in other NELAC states.
- We would be happy with the current intervals of 2 years if ELAP were maintaining this schedule. We went for years without an audit for micro and chemistry.
- In order to not raise current fees, CONSISTENTLY evaluate troubled labs on an annual basis. Labs with good records, visit them every three years. This could spread out your resources better and allow you to concentrate on labs that need guidance. The most important thing is to be consistent. We were almost two years late with our last audit. This is unacceptable and makes one question what we are paying for. Especially if an auditor typically finds nothing wrong.

Audit Frequency – Comments II

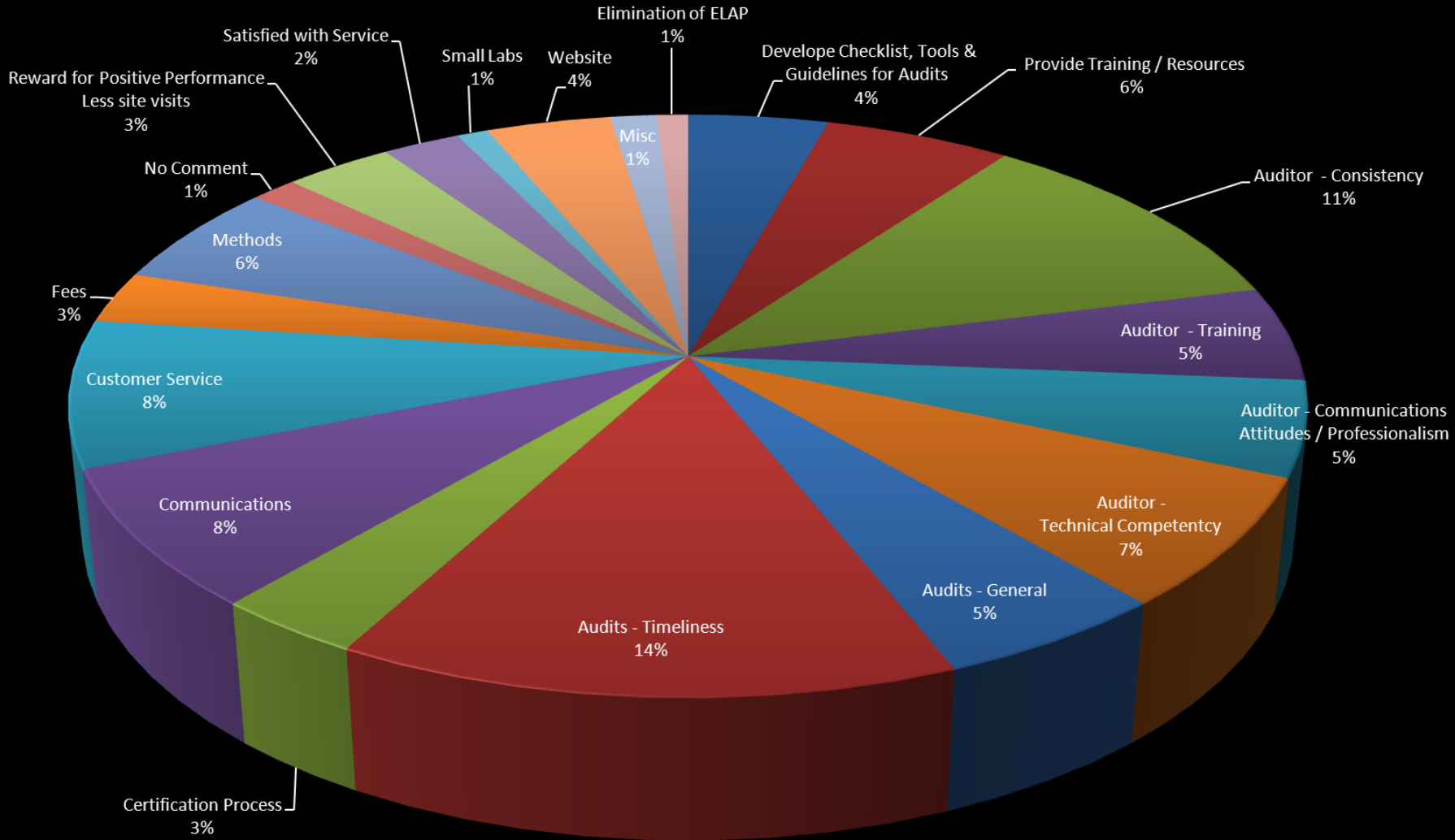
20 Commenters Cite the following:

- I don't believe that anyone really wants more assessments, but we do need to be able to add methods/technologies in a timely manner and we are not able to do this based on the current schedule.
- My lab is not audited by CA but we do have 3 primary accrediting authorities plus client audits. Additionally, we regularly perform internal audits. There is a point where onsite assessments become counter-productive because time is devoted to finding problems instead of solving them.
- They are charging the same fees for a visit every four years as they were when they visited us every two years. ELAP fees cost more than my annual ISO 17025 audits.
- It is notable that several commenters pointed out that they are overdue for their inspection

ELAP Improvement

- All survey respondents were asked to list the top 3 areas where ELAP can improve its service and value to its laboratory customers.
- 91 Laboratories commented

ELAP Improvement



209 Total Comments from 2012 ELAP Survey

Thank you for your time!

Questions?

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