



THE INSTITUTE REVIEW

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It's Time to Reserve Your Spot at the Forum...

By Jerry Parr, TNI

The NELAC Institute's **2020 Forum on Environmental Accreditation** will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Newport Beach, CA, from **February 3-7, 2020**. The Forum will feature open public meetings of all TNI committees to allow quality professionals, chemists, analysts, microbiologists, engineers, and managers from federal and state agencies; commercial, municipal, state, and federal laboratories; and many others who are actively involved and interested in accreditation issues to review what has been done and to participate in the efforts to establish a national environmental accreditation program. The 2019 Forum will include:



- ◆ Meetings of TNI Committees to further TNI efforts on environmental laboratory accreditation, proficiency testing, and accreditation of field sampling and measurement organizations;
- ◆ An exhibit program showcasing the latest innovations in environmental monitoring;
- ◆ Discussion of the new consensus standards in development for asbestos, quality systems, and whole effluent toxicity;
- ◆ An Assessment Forum focusing on working with third-party assessment organizations;
- ◆ A general session with updates about TNI programs; and
- ◆ Training courses on radiochemistry testing and laboratory management.

Special Sessions on the 2016 TNI Standard

As the TNI recognized Accreditation Bodies begin to implement the 2016 Standard next year, TNI has geared much of the 2020 Forum to help these laboratories implement the 2016 TNI standard. The preliminary agenda has eight breakout sessions focused on the 2016 TNI standard and a training course on managing a laboratory.

You may register now using our [on-line registration system](#).

You may also register by [completing the registration form \(PDF\)](#) on the website and sending it to:

The NELAC Institute
PO Box 2439
Weatherford, TX 76086
FAX: 817-623-4777
Email: suzanne.rachmaninoff@nelac-institute.org

We'll See You There!

What to Do in Newport

By Kay and Jerry Parr

Our son Travis and his family live nearby in Laguna Beach so we go out there 2-3 times a year and frequently stay at the Hyatt. While the Hyatt Regency is technically in Newport Beach, it is not actually **on** the beach. It is across PCH (Pacific Coast Highway) from [Balboa Island](#), which connects to Newport Beach via a ferry. It is a short walk (0.7) miles to Balboa, or the hotel courtesy shuttle will take you there. Balboa Island is a fun place to visit with chic coastal shops featuring unique nautical designs, stylish beach fashions, art, and jewelry. It's also home to quaint Balboa Island restaurants and bistros serving up a variety of dishes bursting with flavor. The selections on Balboa Island go beyond the local fresh seafood of the day with flavors of Italian, Mexican, and French-Swiss mixed in. It is also interesting to see the 1000 to 2000 square foot cottages there that go from \$2-7 million depending on location.

At the tip of the Balboa Peninsula, [The Wedge](#) offers world-class bodyboarding and bodysurfing. Newport Harbor is the largest recreational boat harbor on the U.S. west coast, and a popular destination for all boating activities, including sailing, fishing, rowing, kayaking, and paddle boarding. One of our favorite things to do in Newport Harbor is rent a [Duffy Boat](#) for the afternoon. You will need to Uber over there. These electric boats can hold up to 16 and you can bring your own food and beverage aboard.



Rent a Duffy Boat and enjoy the day!

We also like to go to the [Beachcomber Café](#), a restored beachfront cottage, offering a relaxed dining atmosphere with spectacular ocean views and dinner in the Crystal Cove Historic District, a 12.3-acre coastal portion of the 2,791-acre Crystal Cove State Park. The Historic District is an enclave of 46 vintage rustic coastal cottages originally built as a seaside colony in the 1930's & '40's. It is one of the last remaining examples of early 20th century Southern California coastal development. It is about 5 miles from the hotel and you do have to walk a ½ mile or so from the parking lot as cars are not allowed in the village. Reservations required.

[Fashion Island](#) is a mega shopping mall about a mile from the hotel, but hard to walk to because of golf courses. The hotel shuttle is your best bet. There are over 20 restaurants in the mall, including Wahoo's Fish Tacos, one of our very favorite casual places.

Down the hill from the Hyatt is [Back Bay](#), the Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve and Ecological Reserve that draws naturalists and scientists from around the world. Some 35,000 migratory birds and 200 endangered species make their home on the 1,000 acres of coastal wetlands, which also offer



hiking and cycling trails. Some of the threatened and endangered species include the salt marsh bird's beak, brown pelican, California black rail, coastal California gnatcatcher, and Belding's savannah sparrow. You will need your room key to access the Hyatt gate upon your return. Also, the [Back Bay Bistro](#) is directly across the street from the gate and this is where we are planning a Super Bowl party on Sunday. It is also a nice casual, waterfront location for dinner.

For a fun evening, go on over to the artist colony of [Laguna Beach](#), about 10 miles away, and check out all the restaurants and art galleries. Some of our favorites include Brussels Bistro on Forest Avenue and Nick's on PCH.

A Note about Clothing: The Orange County coast can be quite sunny and warm during the day in the winter with highs in the mid 70's. But no matter what time of year, nights can be chilly in the evening, getting down into the 50s due to the wind off the Pacific Ocean current, which comes right down from Alaska. So, plan on bringing a fleece jacket or something else warm if you plan to be out in the evening.



Summary of the Environmental Measurement Symposium

By Lara Phelps, USEPA, and Jerry Parr, TNI

The Environmental Measurement Symposium, which represents the combined meetings of the National Environmental Monitoring Conference (NEMC) and the Forum on Environmental Accreditation (the Forum), took place in Jacksonville, FL this summer from August 5 – 9, 2019. This was the 13th combined meeting of the Forum and the NEMC, and it has only continued to grow.

Around 600 attendees participated in a week full of engaging technical presentations, thoughtful committee meetings of The NELAC Institute (TNI), special workshops, and technology innovation displays, among many other opportunities. The technical presentations from the NEMC portion of the Symposium can be found on the [NEMC website](#).

Below is a summary of the TNI committee activities during the public meeting sessions.

Consensus Standards Development Program Expert Committees

Chemistry – The committee reviewed and approved three SIRs and completed one response, which is yet to be approved. They also completed the SIR Summary spreadsheet. Chad Stoike was confirmed as the new Vice Chair. The primary topics in February will be demonstrations of competency and continued discussions of the Technical Director language.

Field Activities – FAC has combined the TNI language from the 2014 Standard with the ISO/IEC 17025:2017 language. They plan to use PowerDMS for further revisions, so use of that tool was introduced, and creation of the outline of proposed changes was started.

Laboratory Accreditation Body – LAB began its discussions about the formal comments received in response to publication of the outline of proposed changes and the draft revised V2M1. LAB's next step will be to finalize the Voting Draft Standard.

Microbiology – The committee reviewed one SIR and believes that it will be more appropriate as an Implementation Guidance document. They discussed the Technical Director language for the different types of analyses and also whether new topics should be brought into the standard. Casey Raley is the rising Chair.

Proficiency Testing – PTEC reviewed the guidance for PTRL reporting, since the new procedures will be implemented in January 2020. They also looked at SIR topics that recur as they worked to complete the SIR Summary.



Quality Systems – In the first session, QS made progress with discussions of Technical Director qualification language, and also looked at SIRs. The second session was devoted to changes to the standard.

Radiochemistry – The committee continued discussing the Technical Director qualifications needed as well as recommendations for revision of the radiochemistry module. Friday’s training was to be on gamma spectrometry, and there will be one more in the training series in February 2020.

WET – There was not a formal committee meeting due to attendance issues. Instead, the Chair led a productive discussion of both the committee’s accomplishments and its struggles with improving the usefulness of PT testing for WET. Also discussed was how to define requirements in the revised WET module of the standard, for individual demonstrations of competency, when WET tests are typically a team effort with flexible roles among team members. Without ELAB to act as intermediary with the EPA, Lem Walker (EPA representative on TNI’s Board) will seek to assist with achieving data comparability for PT results. Other issues with PTs are more difficult, since, with the organisms being the “detector”, organism health is critical, but frequently depends on the source used (grown in-house or purchased/shipped).

Stationary Source Audit Sampling – This program is at a standstill due to one of the audit sample providers dropping out. With only one provider, EPA cannot require its use, so the program is now voluntary only. A new second provider is being sought, with the affected community divided about whether to continue (the regulators) or not (the stack testers). SSAS had begun revising its standard modules, but is proceeding slowly pending identification of a second provider. Several SOPs will soon undergo revision – one for SSAS table management and the other to lower the concentrations of audit samples. The NEMC and TNI communities are probably not bringing the stack testing community to meetings, so the program is seeking a different conference for improved outreach.

Other Committees

NELAP Accreditation Council – The Council focused its discussions on four (4) topics and requested that the Assessment Forum be scheduled at a time when the Accreditation Body staff can attend.

- Submitting an Analyte Request Application for PCBs – NELAP ABs hope to resolve the issue of labs continually failing PTs, but cannot be suspended because they’re failing different isomers each time, instead of the same one twice in a row. The solution appears to be adding a qualitative PT to the FoPT table, with a footnote for the evaluation of performance by ABs to incorporate both the quantitative and qualitative PTs, in order for a lab to maintain accreditation. The Council plans to ask PT providers for input to this concept prior to submitting it to PTPEC.
- Implementation of the 2016 TNI Standard – almost all NELAP ABs will be implementing this standard in early 2020 due to incorporation by reference or because they planned rulemaking



early enough to have that completed in early 2020. The only AB whose status is uncertain is New Hampshire.

- Technical Manager/Director Qualifications – most NELAP ABs believe they can accept some version of language that allows substitution of experience for education, so long as the experience is well defined. Perhaps TNI can develop a Technical Manager training program with certification that can count as education credits?
- Analyte Request Application for Microbiology (MPN test, tubes separate from wells) – the Council will revisit this request and is inviting EPA to a future Council meeting to further discuss the issue.

Laboratory Accreditation Systems Executive Committee – The Chair reviewed the accomplishments since Milwaukee. Changes have been made to the SIR Management SOP 3-105 to help ensure that SIRs are addressed during revisions to the standard, and another change will be made to accommodate the planned distribution of all incoming SIR questions to the expert committee chairs and the Small Lab Advocate, on an information only basis.

The Mentor Session was standing room only in the morning, but after lunch break, only a handful of participants returned. Apparently, some other session presented a serious conflict to people's interests. The Assessment Forum was well attended. Both of these training sessions were good and lively.

Proficiency Testing Program Executive Committee – After the Chair provided a general introduction to the committee, the PT Provider Accreditors presented their reports to participants. Those reports will be more fully reviewed by the committee in future meetings. The committee also discussed the completed SOP updates for the Field of Proficiency Testing SOP 4-103, especially the triggers for FoPT updates, and its portion of the combined NEFAP/PTPEC Evaluation SOP 7-100. The committee is seeking to resolve a discrepancy between the number of labs and the number of data points for DDT/ and breakdown products, since the PT Provider numbers are not consistent. They also discussed several new and existing Analyte Request Applications still in review, or being returned to active status.

National Environmental Field Activities Program Executive Committee – NEFAP discussed its goal of learning what companies or agencies hiring Field Sampling and Monitoring Organizations look for in their selection process, and to understand how NEFAP can address those selection criteria.

Advocacy – Advocacy has reinstated the Small Laboratory Advocate, with Robin Cook accepting the role, and the first part of its meeting focused on defining that position so that the committee's charter can be properly updated. They further discussed the draft white paper, "The Value of Accreditation", and how to proceed with gathering useful facts to demonstrate that value. Finally, as usual, the committee reviewed meeting activities to identify areas where Advocacy can or should become involved.



TNI Plans for 2020 and Beyond

By Jerry Parr and Carol Batterton, TNI

Twenty-one members of the TNI Board, Expert Committee Chairs and TNI staff met in Sterling, VA, October 17-18, to begin the process of updating TNI's strategic plan. The process began with and review and validation of TNI's mission, vision and programs followed by a summary of TNI's profile and history. Each program also provided an assessment their effectiveness and efficiency. The current strategic plan was then reviewed, and participants celebrated TNI's accomplishments and noted our disappointments.

Participants also spent time assessing changes that have occurred in our operating environment since the last strategic plan by discussing TNI's strengths and weaknesses along with external opportunities and threats, including opportunities for new initiatives. Using all this information, they began the process of reviewing and updating the current strategic plan with new and/or revised strategies, goals and initiatives. TNI staff expect that the first draft of the new strategic plan will be presented to the TNI Board in December. The new plan will undoubtedly contain some exciting, new initiatives to take us into 2020 and beyond. Stay tuned!



TNI Expert Committee Openings for 2020

By Paul Junio, Northern Lake Service, Inc.

TNI's "Procedures for Expert Committee Operations (SOP 2-101)" requires that we annually post the number of openings available for Committee Members for each of our Expert Committees. Membership on an Expert Committee can be time-consuming and rewarding. If you feel that you are able to provide input on the basis of your interest category (Accreditation Body, Laboratory, or Other), and have an interest in joining a committee, the table below shows the number of committee members present on each Expert Committee as of January 1, 2020, along with the interest category that they represent.

Committees may have from 5 to 15 members and must maintain balance. Balance means that no one interest category can be in a position of dominance (representing more than 50% of committee membership). Committee membership is limited to no more than two members of a given organization on a particular expert committee unless approved by the TNI Board of Directors. TNI members are allowed to serve on more than 1 expert committee at a time. Choose wisely if you feel that you can do that!

Committee	Total Members	AB	Lab	Other
LAB	10	3	2	5
Field Activities	11	4	4	3
Chemistry	11	4	4	3
Stationary Source Audit Sample	5	2	2	1
Proficiency Testing	9	2	4	3*
Quality Systems	12	5	3	4
WET	3		2	1
Microbiology	13	5	4	4
Radiochemistry	10	3	4	3
Asbestos	7	2	3	2

**The Proficiency Testing Expert Committee also has an interest category for PT Providers. Each of the members in the Other category on the PT Expert Committee represent the PT Provider interest category.*

To apply to join an Expert Committee (you must be a TNI member), please fill out an [application](#). You will be notified that your application has been received. New members are generally added at or during the first expert committee meeting of the calendar year, although they may be added at any time. Expert Committee members serve a three-year term, with the possibility of serving a second consecutive term.

If you have an interest in a committee that is already full or cannot accommodate another in your interest group, remember that you can also participate as an Associate Committee Member. If you are interested, but still have questions, feel free to [contact me](#) and I will help where I can.



Call for Abstracts for the 36th National Environmental Monitoring Conference

By Earl Hansen, TNI

The NELAC Institute (TNI) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) are co-sponsors of the Environmental Measurement Symposium, the largest conference focused on environmental measurements in North America. The Symposium brings together scientists and managers from federal and state agencies, the regulated community, academia, and laboratory and engineering support communities. It features presentations, posters, training, exhibits, and networking opportunities. The Symposium was created in 2007 by combining the National Environmental Monitoring Conference (NEMC) with the Forum on Environmental Accreditation. The NEMC Steering Committee is inviting abstracts for oral or poster presentations in these specific topic areas:

Abstract submissions are due by January 27, 2020. See the [NEMC website](#) for more information.

- ◆ 50 Years of Progress in Environmental Monitoring
- ◆ Academic Research Topics in Environmental Measurement and Monitoring
- ◆ Advances in Field Sampling, Measurement, and Sensor Technologies
- ◆ Advances in High Resolution Mass Spectrometry and its Emerging Environmental Applications
- ◆ Air Methods, Monitoring, and Technology
- ◆ Best Management Practices for Environmental Laboratories
- ◆ Building Consensus Methods to Support Environmental Laboratories
- ◆ Challenges and Opportunities for Solid Phase Extraction
- ◆ Changing the Paradigm for Water Pollution Monitoring
- ◆ Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in the Environment
- ◆ Citizen Science
- ◆ Collaborative Efforts to Improve Environmental Monitoring
- ◆ Current Topics in Microbiology
- ◆ Data Quality, Management, and Review
- ◆ Drinking Water
- ◆ Environmental Forensics
- ◆ Food Authenticity Testing
- ◆ Handling Interferences in Complex Matrices
- ◆ Identifying and Combatting Inappropriate Laboratory Practices.
- ◆ Laboratory Informatics
- ◆ Metals Analysis and Remediation
- ◆ Microcystins: Methods, Sampling, and Prevalence in Environmental Waters

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Call for Abstracts cont.



- ◆ New Organic Monitoring Techniques
- ◆ Operational and Advocacy Issues Impacting the Environmental Laboratory Industry
- ◆ Public and Private Environmental/ Public Health Laboratory Partnerships
- ◆ Shale Oil and Gas
- ◆ Wet Chemistry Automation

Please provide your abstract by **January 27, 2020**. Abstracts received after the deadline are not guaranteed to be reviewed due to the number of available time slots and the high number of quality and timely submissions received. More information and submission instructions are on the NEMC website at www.nemc.us.



Labs Helping Labs

By Jacob Oaxaca, California Water Boards

California's current environmental laboratory accreditation regulations were adopted in 1994 and have not been updated to include modernized accreditation standards. Because the regulations have remained stagnant for so many years, many laboratories in California are apprehensive of California ELAP's proposal to incorporate the 2016 TNI Standard into regulation.

Recognizing that for some, this apprehensiveness has manifested itself in the form of resistance and a belief that TNI's quality management system cannot be implemented by laboratories in California, a group spearheaded by the American Council of Independent Laboratories (ACIL) harnessed the power of mentorship, of labs helping labs, to counter the concerns in a positive way.

Over the past year, expert laboratories who are currently implementing a quality management system have mentored several small laboratories in California that wanted to advance their laboratory operations and management practices by being an early adopter of the 2016 TNI Standard. Initial onsite meetings were held in which a gap analysis was performed, a collaborative timeline and plan was developed, and tools for successful implementation were provided. Within a year, most of the participating laboratories were able to implement the 2016 TNI Standard without hiring additional staff.

As expected, each laboratory had its own challenges, but implementation was achievable with the right attitude, tools, and resources. Most imperative though, was the "lifeline" that the mentors were able to offer providing ongoing remote support via phone or email.

Mentorship is an incredibly powerful tool. Building on the common goal of labs helping labs, TNI and California ELAP are exploring ways to expand the mentor initiative to reach a larger number of laboratories. If you are interested in participating, either as a mentor or mentee, contact California ELAP at ELAPCA@waterboards.ca.gov.

Methods 608.3, 624.1, and 625.1 - Quality Control Acceptance Criteria Update

A Cooperative Effort Among ACIL, APHL, TNI, and WEF

By Carol Batterton, TNI

On September 27, 2017, three (3) new EPA methods were approved – 608.3, 624.1 and 625.1. These are updates of methods developed in the 1970s. While the technology has changed a lot since then, the method performance data and Quality Control criteria in these new methods are what existed at the time of their validation, and likely do not represent what is now achievable.

As the EPA stated in the preamble to the final rule published on August 28:

Although EPA received comments about updating the QC acceptance criteria, EPA did not adopt such changes because EPA lacks data from a multi-laboratory validation study from which to develop such criteria.

In response to concerns expressed by TNI members about these methods, TNI contacted several other organizations that had expressed similar concerns and proposed a partnership which includes TNI, the Water Environment Federation (WEF), the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), and the American Council of Independent Laboratories (ACIL). We have discussed with these organizations the potential for providing data that could be used by EPA to update the old QC acceptance criteria. In a letter to EPA on January 26, 2018, we noted that our organizations represent a significant number of the commercial, state and municipal laboratories that will be using these updated methods in the future. We stated that we would very much appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the Agency and its staff in addressing this important issue.

In response to the letter, EPA expressed interest in pursuing this project with the partner organizations. EPA has noted that this is a secondary data collection effort and no “new” (primary) data are being generated. EPA requested the partners develop a Study Plan for secondary data collection that would outline what data deliverables will be required and what data review will take place.

In order to ensure representative datasets are used to update the QC criteria, we are attempting to provide EPA with data from a representative cross section of the laboratory community: large commercial laboratory chains, small independent laboratories, and publicly-owned treatment works (POTW) laboratories.

Later this year, all laboratories accredited for these methods will be asked to volunteer to participate in this project. Data collection would not begin until 2020. If your laboratory is interested in participating in this effort, please complete this form: <https://nelac-institute.org/content/submit-qcdemo.php>. This early indication of interest is not binding on your laboratory. There will be an opportunity to review the Study Plan before a final commitment is made. This is a unique opportunity for laboratories across all sectors to work with EPA to solve a common concern.



NELAP Laboratories: The 2016 TNI Standard will be Yours in 2020!

By Lynn Bradley, NELAP Program Administrator

In June of 2018, the NELAP Accreditation Council voted to adopt the 2016 TNI Environmental Laboratory Sector Standard, Volumes 1 and 2 (“the 2016 NELAP Standard”), and in January of 2019, set the implementation date as January 31, 2020. All of the required guidance documents are approved and all but two of the NELAP Accreditation Bodies (ABs) are planning on full implementation sometime during 2020, and the remaining two may well accomplish it by the end of 2020!

During the transition period, each of the NELAP ABs will recognize accreditations by all other NELAP ABs for secondary accreditations, regardless of which standard is formally used, but overall, this transition will be completed far more rapidly than has happened with the 2009 TNI Standard. The actual process for implementation of the 2016 TNI Standard is unique for each state, with some adopting the standard by reference while others must write specific state regulations.

If you are a NELAP accredited lab, your AB will keep you informed of its progress towards implementation, but you can always contact your AB directly if you have specific concerns. The listing of NELAP ABs can be found at <https://nelac-institute.org/content/NELAP/accred-bodies.php>.

Please note that each lab accredited to the 2016 Standard is expected to own a legitimate copy of it at the time of implementation. Sales of the standard thus far indicate that only a fraction of labs have purchased their copies. To get your copy, visit https://nelac-institute.org/content/CSDP/standards.php?ap3=1_2, and note that, if you are a TNI member, you should log in to the Members Only portion of the website before making your purchase so that you receive the Member Discount. Be sure to download copies of the FREE Guidance Documents that accompany Volume 1; you can find those under the Guidance bar at <https://nelac-institute.org/content/NELAP/interpret.php>.

Also, the Small Lab Handbook has been updated for the 2016 Standard, and is available at <https://nelac-institute.org/content/NELAP/howto.php>, under the Small Lab Handbook bar. Again, if you’re a TNI member, be sure to log in to the Members Only portion to receive your discount for its purchase. The Quality Manual Template is unchanged since the 2017 version, so that existing copies are still suitable for the 2016 Standard.

For your convenience, here’s an updated table (on the next page) of how the various states are expecting their implementation to proceed. Your AB will definitely communicate with each of its labs about the transition.



Implementation Plans for 2016 TNI ELS Standard		
State	Process for Implementing the New Standard	Anticipated Implementation Date
FL	FL adopted the TNI 2016 Standards by regulation on September 26, 2018. Laboratories were granted a grace period until April 1, 2019, to implement the new standards.	Fully implemented on April 1, 2019
IL	Rulemaking was finalized in July 2019, with a 6 month integration period and full implementation on January 1, 2020.	January 1, 2020
KS	Discussions with state lawyers about the regulations are underway, but there may be a six month delay in implementation.	Mid 2020 (hopefully)
LA DEQ	Regulation updates are underway and expected to be complete by July 2020.	July 1, 2020 (hopefully)
LA DOH	Rulemaking initiated, hope to complete in time to implement by January 2020, with time for labs to comply.	January 31, 2020 (hopefully)
MN	Incorporated into regulation by reference, expect to fully implement by the end of 2020 but is encouraging labs to move forward with implementation sooner.	December 31, 2020
NH	Requires rulemaking plus time for labs to comply.	2020 (hopefully)
NJ	Incorporated into regulation by reference.	January 31, 2020
NY	Adopts by reference. Is rewriting regulation to update other aspects on separate timeline	January 31, 2020, with a 6 month grace period while it brings IT systems online
OK	Requires rulemaking, is currently doing outreach to labs.	Earliest will be September 2020
OR	Requires rulemaking plus time for labs to comply; database development is underway.	March 30, 2020
PA	Incorporated into regulation by reference.	February 2020
TX	Incorporated into regulation by reference.	January 31, 2020
UT	Rulemaking underway; will need database updates.	February 2020
VA	Rulemaking is beginning now.	Unknown



Current Status of the Stationary Source Audit Sample Program (SSAS)

By Tom Widera, ERA

On May 28, 2019, Sigma-Aldrich informed EPA that they will no longer support the SSAS program. With this announcement, there is now only one Accredited Audit Sample Provider (AASP) left in the program.

As per the Final Rule for the Restructuring of the Stationary Source Audit Program, September 13, 2010, the audit program must have samples that are commercially available. “Commercially available” is defined as having two or more independent AASPs. As a result of having only one AASP, EPA was obligated to suspend the program and provide notification on their website (<https://www.epa.gov/emc>).

EPA posted a note in the Federal Register on September 11, 2019 (84FR47882) announcing the suspension of the SSAS program. EPA is seeking public comment on whether they should continue the SSAS program, redefine “commercially available” as it pertains to the number of AASPs having audit sample available, and on the effectiveness of the SSAS program.

The public comment period is open until December 10, 2019. The SSAS Expert Committee continues to meet to update current program documents in an effort to try to attract an additional AASP into the program.



ChairSpeaks

Musings from the TNI Chair

What Strategic Planning Tells Me

A few weeks ago, a group of TNI leaders sequestered themselves in a Washington DC suburb hotel and for a day and half deliberated on strategies and goals to guide the Institute's actions for the next five years. By my count, this is the third time I have participated in such an exercise with TNI, but I have been a part of various others for other organizations.

Depending on your profile's tolerance for visioning and channeling, you may find these meetings invigorating or exhausting. I tend towards the former, but at this meeting I found myself doing more reflection and synthesis. It was mildly liberating to be less concerned with process.

In his Third Symphony, Gustav Mahler writes music describing what the flowers in the meadow, the animals in the forest, man, the angels, and love all tell him. He was more inspired and infinitely more talented than me, and bleak Virginia on arrival was no match for rural Austria in the summer. So, I can only share some thoughts on what this strategic planning session "told" me.

Numbers Matter

We invited the TNI Board, Committee Chairs, and selected TNI leaders to attend the meeting. We had about 20 participants, including TNI Staff. The group was manageable and its size gave everyone a chance to be heard. Fewer would not have been sufficiently representative and more would have taxed the limited time we had available for our agenda.

The More You Do It, the Better You Get at It

Reiteration taught us that we did not have to revisit many of the norming discussions of previous strategic planning meetings. Our Mission and Vision are solid and still relevant. No one questions their validity or applicability. The core strategies we identified at our last session continue to apply, with some minor refinements. This time we added one more strategy dealing with expansion, exploration of additional benefits for stakeholders, and support of the Institute's financial stability.

You will be able to see the entire plan once it is final to get more details, but for now, I just want to highlight that operating under the "less is more" principle did not preclude us from considering initiatives. It is very satisfying to confirm that the path we set years ago is still good pavement.

Surprise! We Write Standards

We cannot deny it. We will continue to write standards as part of our core functions, no matter what else we embark on. Because we write standards, we are comfortable discussing language and do that until we get to the right word. Well, truly, during this meeting there was not too much of that. Our



standard-writing pedigree was more evident when we started to discuss goals (subsets of strategies) and their placement in the plan. There probably was a reason why years ago, a group of taxonomists approached TNI about the possibility of drafting standards for their use, but those standards did not materialize. Did we even scare the taxonomists away?

This time, we deferred heavy word-smithing to a set of able drafters that will then share their product with TNI leadership. This worked because there is a lot of earned trust among all participants. This also allowed us to focus on strategic content, not packaging.

Breaks and Rest Are Essential

Creativity, so necessary for this kind of activity, requires equal doses of stimulation and reflection. The excitement comes from guided discussion and time spent together outside the meeting room at lunch and dinner. The morning after brings-up insights gained from considering and examining previous ponderings on one's own, after a good night sleep. The second morning session of the meeting had an extraordinary flow and the quality of the ideas and suggestions discussed was superior.

We are Not that Young Anymore

TNI has grown-up. We are not a founding organization. We are beyond essaying first steps and babbling first words. The programmatic assessments we reviewed at the meeting paint a good picture of the Institute. We appear to be headed into middle adulthood with a good set of skills and experience. We know we need to ensure our financial sustainability and included that dimension in our newest strategy. Doesn't that sound like responsible adult talk?

In the End

A plan is just a plan, even a very important one as is a strategic plan. The completed plan will be there to remind us of where we want to go and where we do not want to go. But, things change; they always do. And so, the plan is a roadmap not scripture. The ultimate purpose of this strategic plan is to facilitate us pursuing TNI's mission, not to predict the future with perfect accuracy. I believe the plan that will come out of our meeting will do that very well.

Only connect.

Alfredo

Alfredo Sotomayor
TNI Chair

Informational Items of Interest

By Jerry Parr, TNI

ELAB Dissolved...

On October 17, 2019, in an email to the current members of EPA's Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board (ELAB), EPA announced it was dissolving ELAB, stating:

On June 14, 2019, President Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 13875: Evaluating and Improving the Utility of Federal Advisory Committees. The EO required federal agencies to review and evaluate the need for each of the agency's federal advisory committees (FACs) established under Agency authority or authorized by law but not required by statute. After conducting a thorough review with senior leadership of its 22 committees, the Agency recommended and the Office of Management & Budget approved that the EPA not retain ELAB. The agency determined that there are existing committees and other mechanisms that can provide EPA with the guidance and work products that fall under ELAB's charge.

New Methods Update Proposed Rule from the EPA Office of Water...

On October 23, 2019, EPA published a new proposed Methods Update Rule for the wastewater program. For the most part, this proposed rule just contains updates to more recent versions of Standard Methods and ASTM methods. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-10-22/pdf/2019-22437.pdf>

National Academy of Sciences Issues Report on Improving Data Quality...

The National Academy of Sciences has published a report assessing 257 laboratories in the US Geological Survey to determine how these laboratories can improve data quality. The report evaluated 4 different approaches:

- 1) Scientist-defined procedures and protocols that are implemented at the individual laboratory level.
- 2) Institution-defined best practices that are implemented at the individual laboratory level.
- 3) Institution-defined Quality Management Systems (QMS) requirements that are implemented throughout the institution.
- 4) Externally-defined QMS requirements that are implemented at the institution or individual laboratory level to demonstrate compliance with an external quality standard.

The report concluded that laboratories focused on supporting research and method development, which need the flexibility to innovate and experiment, institution-defined best practices (step 2) are appropriate. In contrast, laboratories that carry out well-characterized and routine analyses for internal or external users (production activities) would benefit from an institution-defined QMS (step 3). A few of these laboratories (e.g., the National Water Quality Laboratory) may also need to meet externally-defined QMS requirements (step 4). <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25524/assuring-data-quality-at-us-geological-survey-laboratories>

Football Tailgating Recipe and Ideas

By Lara Phelps

Are you ready for some football??? Yes – it is that time of the year for those of us who are football (or sports) junkies. The idea of having friends over or gathering in a parking lot several hours before a game is a wonderful excuse to eat (and possibly drink) too much, but regardless have a great time. So, I thought I would offer a couple suggestions in addition to a simple recipe that you can customize a touch to impress everyone.

First, don't forget the simple. Deviled eggs can be served for a game anytime of the day – whether your game is at Noon or 8:00 pm. There are tons of variations with two recipes I would offer – classic and pimento cheese. For 6 eggs (12 halves) with a classic recipe, mix the boiled yolks with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup mayonnaise, 1 tsp mustard, 1 tsp vinegar, and salt/pepper to taste. For 6 eggs (12 halves) with a pimento cheese recipe, mix the boiled yolks with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup pimento cheese and 2 tbsp mayo. Once you put the filling in the eggs, top with dill, paprika, olive slices, and more.

To impress your friends, while keeping it relatively simple, create a taco dip designed like a football field (picture provided).

INGREDIENTS:

- ◆ 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs of ground beef
- ◆ 14 oz can refried beans
- ◆ Taco seasoning packet (or make your own)
- ◆ 4 green onions
- ◆ 6 pretzel rods
- ◆ 1 bundle cilantro chopped
- ◆ 1 bundle parsley chopped
- ◆ $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sour cream
- ◆ Black olives (or Kalamata olives)
- ◆ Green olives
- ◆ Pita chips or tortilla chips



For the dip, brown the ground beef and season with your favorite taco seasoning. Heat refried beans. While these are cooking, microwave onion tops (roughly 15 – 20 sec), create goal posts with the pretzel rods by tying them at the two top corners with the onions (see photo below). In a 13 x 9 dish, fill with the seasoned ground beef and top with a smooth layer of the refried beans. Sprinkle with a combination of the cilantro and parsley (OPTION – you can use one or the other or a blend). Put the sour cream in a plastic bag and cut the tip so you can make lines across your field. Put players using your olives on each side of the field and insert the goal posts on each end. Serve with chips!