Implementation Update on New Proficiency Testing Requirements (Correlation Proviso)

1.0 Background

CAEAL was evaluated against ISO/IEC 17011 by APLAC in July of 2005. One of the findings related to the fact that CAEAL required laboratories to participate in PT if CAEAL offered it but that there was little evidence that laboratories were expected to seek third party PT for analytes not supported by CAEAL PT. To correct this, CAEAL issued revised PT requirements (Correlation Proviso) that involve a hierarchy of options for PT support. Accredited laboratories were asked to submit PT plans for review and approval by CAEAL.

There have been some questions about interpretation and implementation of the revised requirements. To ensure that all accredited laboratories are receiving the same information, CAEAL has summarized the most common concerns below.

Overall requirements are given in the Correlation Proviso contained in Section 1.5 of P02–*Program Description* (http://www.caeal.ca/P02_English_Prog_Desc.pdf).

2.0 The PT Plan

Is the PT plan mandatory? Yes. Laboratories must submit a PT Plan that details how they are going to comply with the Correlation Proviso. The plan will be reviewed and approved by CAEAL. The 2007 application form (http://www.caeal.ca/P04_English_App_Form.pdf) will request information concerning the PT a laboratory will be using for new appendices.

What if the laboratory disagrees with the PT Plan review? All decisions made by CAEAL staff can be appealed. Simply follow the CAEAL dispute and appeals procedure given in Q28–*Disputes and Appeals within CAEAL Programs* (http://www.caeal.ca/Q28_Disputes_Appeals.pdf).

3.0 Implementation

When are labs expected to comply with the revised Correlation Proviso? The revised Correlation Proviso was implemented in 2006 and laboratories are expected to comply by the end of 2006. For options iii through vi, this means that the laboratory must participate in at least one comparison by the end of 2006.

4.0 Option ii of the Correlation Proviso

Option ii of the correlation proviso is the only option (other than the use of CAEAL PT) that requires two studies per year and the routine reporting of results to the CAEAL office. Because direction was not provided to laboratories until part way through the year, laboratories are only required to complete one PT study in 2006 but will be expected to participate in at least two studies per year in 2007.

If CAEAL PT covers some analytes in an appendix but not 50%, does the laboratory have to find additional PT? Yes. Laboratories will have to find additional PT but, wherever possible, CAEAL will examine the feasibility of expanding existing PT test groups so that at least 50% of analytes are covered. In light of this, CAEAL has expanded the C17-metals in soil, C18-PAHs in soil, C07-PAHs in water and C16-VOCs in water. The additional parameters will be available in 2007. Laboratories are encouraged to notify CAEAL of any others that will be of value.

Does the laboratory have to request custom samples? The intent of option ii is simply to make use of existing PT programs. There is no need for laboratories to arrange for custom samples or custom schedules. If the analyte is not offered in the catalogues of the approved providers the laboratory should proceed to the next option. Because the CAEAL PT program covers many of the analytes offered by other PT providers, the option selected for many analytes will be option vi, inter-analyst comparisons.

How many samples are required per study? If the scheme of the approved provider uses one sample per study, then the lab will analyse one sample per study. If the scheme uses more than one sample per study, then the laboratory must analyse all of them.

How can a laboratory have a PT Provider added to the approved list? In order for a Provider to be added to the approved list a request must be made by the Provider (the provider must be an accredited PT Provider or be investigated and approved by CAEAL) and the Provider must agree to have their contact information listed on CAEAL's web site. If the Provider does not agree to these conditions, they will not be added to the list.

How will the laboratory report results to CAEAL? Starting in 2007, laboratories will report results through a simplified web-data-entry system. The system will be open all year and laboratories will simply enter the date of the study, the provider and the outcome (i.e., acceptable or not acceptable). Neither the laboratories nor the PT Providers need to forward official PT reports to CAEAL unless specifically requested. For 2006, CAEAL will contact laboratories and ask them to forward copies of PT Provider reports for specific analytes to the CAEAL office.

5.0 Monitoring For Compliance

How will CAEAL monitor for compliance? There will be two tools used to monitor for compliance. Prior to assessments, assessors are provided with information on the laboratory's PT plan. The laboratory will be assessed against that plan. Should an assessor find that the plan is not being followed for an analyte, a finding will be raised and the laboratory will have 45 days to provide evidence of corrective action.

The second way in which laboratories will be monitored is through surveillance. Every year, starting in 2006, laboratories will be asked to submit selected copies of PT reports in support of their plans.

6.0 Implications

What are the cost implications of the new Correlation Proviso? For laboratories that are complying with the PT requirements of ISO/IEC 17025 (i.e., participating in PT for all accredited analytes) the cost implications will be minimal. Additional PT may be required if the frequency required is greater than the frequency currently employed by the laboratory.

What are the implications of PT failure? The same rules that apply to CAEAL PT will apply to PT analysed under option ii. One failure will result in a **possible suspension**, two consecutive failures will result in a **suspension**.

For options iii through vi, assessors will examine PT records during the assessment. If the records indicate a PT failure, records should also be available of the root cause analysis performed and the corrective action implemented.

How will third party PT be used in the accreditation decision? As part of the accreditation application process, laboratories will indicate the PT option they will be using to support new appendices. If one of options i through iv is applicable, accreditation will not be granted for an analyte until the laboratory has demonstrated successful participation in at least one study.