



THE FQS UPDATE



Welcome to "THE FQS UPDATE"

It seems appropriate that a New Year should bring with it some changes, and so it is for Forensic Quality Services—a new office and soon-to-have a new President. We at FQS wish you a happy, healthy, and "quality" New Year. May all of your changes be positive ones.

Pat Wojtowicz, Manager of Accreditations, FQS-I

FQS has a new home

After nearly four years as a tenant in the NFSTC building in Largo, Florida, FQS has relocated its office to the Summit Executive Center in Clearwater, Florida. FQS thanks NFSTC for its hospitality these past few years.

Our new office is approximately four miles east of our previous location. The services available in the new building and its proximity to hotels and restaurants will enhance our ability to conduct training courses and other FQS business on-site.

Effective immediately, our new address is: **13575 58th Street North, Suite 153, Clearwater, FL 33760-3721, (Phone) 727-538-4134, (Fax) 727-538-4299** The FQS web site address and staff e-mail addresses are unchanged.



The Summit Executive Center in Clearwater, FL, the new home of Forensic Quality Services

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William Tilstone resigns AS FQS President

William J. Tilstone, Ph.D., is resigning from his voluntary position as President of FQS, effective as of the close of business on December 31, 2007. This coincides with Bill's retirement from the National Forensic Science Technology Center (NFSTC). Bill has been President of FQS since 2004, when the FQS business unit of the NFSTC formally separated from the NFSTC to become an independent not-for-profit corporation. Although FQS will miss Bill's leadership as President, we are pleased to say that his association with FQS will continue as he transitions to a role as an independent contractor for FQS. An announcement from the FQS Board of Directors regarding a new FQS President will be forthcoming.

Take a break from winter with an "ISO Without Tears" workshop in florida

Katy Savage, FQS Business and Academic Programs Manager

Escape from a northern winter/early spring by attending one of the two sessions currently scheduled for the "ISO Without Tears" workshop being presented by FQS.

These workshops are provided as an alternative to our existing customizable workshops that are conducted by FQS at individual agencies.

The workshops will be held at the Summit Executive Center, 13575 58th St. N., Clearwater, FL. 33760, on the following dates:

- ◆ **February 4 – 6, 2008.** Registration deadline January 28, 2008
- ◆ **April 7 – 9, 2008.** Registration deadline March 30, 2008

A course registration form is available from the FQS web site at www.forquality.org. Please return registration forms to our **new** address (see page 1 of the newsletter.)

Less-than-GSA special rates for attendees have been arranged at the **Holiday Inn Express**, 13625 ICOT Blvd., Clearwater, FL 33760. (Tel.) **727-536-7275**. The hotel is within walking distance of the Summit Executive Center. The rates are (exclusive of taxes):

February 3-6, 2008 - \$115.00/night

April 6-9, 2008 - \$92.00/night

Reservations must be made by the following dates and you must ask for the "Forensic Quality Services" room rate to ensure you get the proper pricing.

January 20, 2008 (for February workshop)

March 23, 2008 (for April workshop)

NOTE: This is a change in workshop location and hotel from what was announced in the September 2007 newsletter.

The workshop will end at lunchtime on the third day to enable participants to return home on Day 3.

Because FQS believes that smaller class sizes facilitate discussion and enhance the learning experience, attendance will be capped at 10 for each session.

Each workshop will address the following:

- ◆ Overview of ISO standards and accreditation
- ◆ Review of general and technical requirements of ISO 17025
- ◆ Discussion of agency preparation for ISO 17025 accreditation, including principles of internal auditing
- ◆ Review of forensic testing-specific aspects of ISO 17025 and supplements

The workshop is based on FQS's experiences of training and accrediting agencies to the ISO 17025 standard. FQS has been in operation for nearly 10 years and its FQS-I business unit has accredited more than 50 agencies (and growing).

Please note that the content of these workshops is generic and relevant to preparation for ISO accreditation from any accrediting body.

The registration fee is \$275 per person and includes

- ◆ Instruction
- ◆ Workshop materials
- ◆ Copy of ILAC Guide 19
- ◆ Refreshments

Registration does not cover

- ◆ Travel, meals, or lodging.
- ◆ Lunch
- ◆ ISO/IEC 17025:2005. It is strongly recommended that you have a copy of the Standard. A copy will be made available for each participant's use during the seminar; however, it is a copyrighted document and cannot be provided by FQS for your retention (Note: all state and local laboratories received a free copy of the standard as well as a copy of Malcolm and Peel's book "Introduction to Accreditation for Forensic Labs" 2nd edition.)

FQS can also bring "ISO Without Tears" on-site to an individual agency. Please contact Katy Savage for further information at kas@forquality.org



New and revised FQS-I documents

The following is a list of new and/or revised documents recently authorized for use by FQS-I. The documents are posted on the FQS web site at www.forquality.org

Revision-General Requirements for Accreditation (GRA): Version 2007/1 does not create any new requirements; the following changes were made to provide additional clarity to the FQS-I accreditation process and/or provide guidance on situations that have arisen during several recent assessments: Substitute "agency" for "laboratory"; broaden definition of agencies accredited by FQS-I; limit applicability of FRA-1 to those agencies performing testing for criminal investigations; clarify that FRA-2 applies only to laboratories performing forensic DNA casework and databasing with possible CODIS application; add section describing FQS-I supplemental documents (1.2.4); clarify the basis for objecting to the appointment of an FQS-I lead assessor (2.3.3); add section regarding accreditation when corrective actions are incomplete (2.5.3); add section regarding appeal of assessment non-conformities (2.4.3); add section clarifying what is required to substantiate agency "belief in conformance" with standards prior to submitting application for accreditation (2.1.3.1); clarification of language regarding cycle of accreditation; add section (2.3.10) to discuss issues surrounding the postponement of an assessment.

Revision- FRA-4: Version 2007/2 is changed to remove language about "approved" proficiency test providers (FQS-I provides information about available external tests, but does not "approve" PT providers) and align the language with that of the FQS-I policy on proficiency testing, FRAP-2. Modify discussion on proficiency testing (5.9.1) so as to conform with FRAP-2 in the following: change "suitable" to "appropriate", and replace definition of "suitable" with a referral to the FRAP-2 policy on "appropriate" proficiency tests.

Editor's Note: On December 20, 2007, an opinion piece entitled "Low bid accreditation will doom forensic science" was published on the web site of a publication called "Crime Lab Report". Because the FQS-I accreditation program was featured so prominently in that opinion piece, it seems appropriate for the FQS Newsletter to include in this issue the following commentary on that article.

Comment on "crime lab report" article

William J. Tilstone, PhD

Many people have asked me to respond to the article on accreditation. I am happy to do this and to put my name to the article. I should, however, add that at this time I have retired from employment with NFSTC and also from the voluntary position of President of FQS. I have tried to keep the article factual but any views are mine and do not purport to represent those of either organization.

Procurement ethics and legislation: Governments throughout the U.S. have at least codes of ethics for procurement, and most back these with legislation. All share the common purpose of gaining the best value for the taxpayer, and all the ones that I have reviewed in detail have provisions to permit factors other than price to be incorporated into the evaluation process, provided that they can be specified objectively and therefore the responses from different bidders measured. Public sector procurements cover a huge range of goods and services. Procurement officers are experienced in applying the fundamental principles, including competitive bidding, to the whole range including those that affect the daily well-being of the citizens.

As an aside, the mantra for competition as implemented so effectively in the U.S. economy is two-fold: it drives down prices and drives up quality. Providers must look to their costs and their product to make sure that the customer is receiving value for money, and procurement officers do the same thing on behalf of the people that they represent.

Accreditation in the U.S. and internationally: Accreditation has been around for a long time. The oldest accrediting body in the world is the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) in Australia, which was established in 1947. Globally, accreditation bodies (ABs) have tended to come together to share practices and standards, culminating in the formation of the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) in 1977. The common thread in ILAC's activities is that they require ABs to operate programs that comply with ISO/IEC 17025:2005 (or the various ISO documents relating to the competency of testing and calibration laboratories prior to 2005). They also require that ABs manage their operations in conformity to ISO 17011:2005 "General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies".

Amongst its many activities, ILAC develops consensus guides for various aspects of accreditation. One of these, Guide 19, covers the forensic sciences. The programs provided by ASCLD/LAB and FQS-I each comply with the requirements of ISO 17025 and ILAC Guide 19.

There are ABs in Australia, Canada and throughout Europe that operate ISO 17025 compliant programs in forensic science. They all operate with flexible scopes of accreditation,

permitting laboratories to apply for specific parts of their operations. There are valid arguments on both sides for either flexible scopes or "one in, all in" scopes. In brief, the argument for flexible scopes is that they encourage entry into the accreditation process, laboratories can extend the scope as they become more experienced with operating under ISO 17025, and a quality failure in one area can be remediated by implementing corrective action in that area without withdrawing the accreditation for the whole laboratory.

The U.S. has its own accreditation oversight body, the National Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation (NACLA), formed in 1998 with the support of NIST and ANSI, amongst others. Currently, ASCLD/LAB and FQS are each not only members of NACLA, but play a major part in its operations providing the Treasurer and President of the organization. There is one major difference in the way that NACLA operates compared to the ILAC rules and the operation of other regional accreditation cooperations such as those that are active in Europe (the EA), the Asia-Pacific (APLAC), and the Americas (IAAC). That difference is that there are many more ABs in the U.S. and competition is an integral part of the way that they operate within the U.S. economy. NACLA has recently reinforced its stance as recognizing that market reality and has developed partnerships that focus on implementation of standards so that customers can be sure that the ABs competing for their business are competent accreditors.

Ensuring competency: Accreditation is about ensuring the competency of testing and calibration. There are parallel processes for ensuring the competency of ABs, namely external evaluation for conformity to ISO 17011. FQS-I successfully completed an evaluation by NACLA more than 2 years ago and ASCLD/LAB and FQS-I are both in the process of evaluation by IAAC.

History of FQS: The author of the article makes it clear what his or her opinions are on the way that NFSTC and FQS developed their quality systems support to the point at which they were providing full accreditations to forensic science laboratories. Like any of these situations there is another side to each opinion. I respect the overall intent of the article - the writer is concerned about the quality of forensic science service and everything that goes into ensuring it. I agree. There are many places that the "he said, she said" of the article could be played over, but a publication aimed at helping crime laboratory management to achieve the goal of fault-free, timely, necessary service provision is not one of them.

(Continued on Page 4)

Comment on “crime lab report” article (continued from Page 3)

However, for the record, I would like to make just three factual observations about FQS history. The first is that the FQS ISO accreditation program was developed in 1998-99 when there was no other ISO program available for forensic science providers in the U.S. The launch customer was the EPA's National Enforcement Investigation Center (NEIC). The second is that the relationship with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) is one that was considered at great length by the board of NFSTC, and the decision to offer the program was made on two grounds: first that there was still no other ISO program for forensic science in the U.S. and secondly that the GBI was at that time accredited by ASCLD/LAB and had ISO 9002 quality systems certification from an ANSI/RAB registrar. In that context, dropping the ISO 9002 certification for an accreditation that included the same quality management system provisions but within the framework of a forensic science accreditation made sense; GBI maintained their ASCLD/LAB accreditation. The final point is that FQS and NFSTC went their separate ways to simplify the management of the NIJ-funded, no cost to the user, programs (NFSTC) and the cost-recovery programs developed in response to customer requests (FQS).

Sole source procurement: Items 1, 3 and 7 in the list presented at the end of the article can all be met by ASCLD/LAB and by FQS-I. “Responsible”, “expert services” and “public interest” are all somewhat subjective and open-ended factors. It is hard to see any objective assessment

that would result in a history of eight years experience in providing ISO accreditations to the forensic sciences and successful completion of an evaluation to ISO 17011 not satisfying these requirements. I'm not sure what the critical mass for number of laboratories is, but it is less than what either ASCLD/LAB International or FQS-I has.

Point number 5 on the list cannot be ignored. There is existing legislation that describes the requirements of an AB in at least some aspects of forensic science accreditation. The programs of ASCLD/LAB and FQS-I all satisfy them.

A final point: Supporters and critics of the ASCLD/LAB and FQS-I programs could fill the pages of the Crime Laboratory Report and many other blogs and journals for the next 12 months. One of the nice things about competitive procurement is that each laboratory has the chance to see for itself what the programs have to offer and make an objective, scientific decision for themselves. The one thing that the procurement process cannot do, of course, is tell you what the accreditation was actually like. However, you can go to the list of accredited labs, randomly select a few, and ask.

Editors Note: A list of FQS-I accredited agencies is found on the FQS web site at www.forquality.org. Parties interested in following up on Dr. Tilstone's last suggestion may also contact Manager of Accreditations Pat Wojtowicz to obtain names and contact information for representatives from our accredited agencies.

Achievements in accreditation

Congratulations to the following agencies that achieved FQS-I ISO 17025 accreditation, reaccreditation, or expansion of scope of accreditation in the 4th quarter of 2007:

Fairfax Identity Laboratories (initial ISO accreditation)

Illinois State Police Forensic Science Command—nine laboratories : Springfield, R&D (Springfield), Chicago, Metro-East (Fairview Heights), Southern (Carbondale), Morton, Joliet, Rockford, and Westchester (all reaccreditation)

Maxxam Analytics, Inc. (initial FQS-I ISO accreditation)

South Dakota State Forensic Laboratory
(expansion of scope of accreditation)



FORENSIC QUALITY SERVICES

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Forensic Quality Services (FQS) provides a range of organizational assistance and training/education services to support Forensic Science delivery.

Forensic Quality Services-International (FQS-I) is the country's longest established provider of ISO 17025 accreditation to forensic testing agencies in the U.S. It is one of the accrediting bodies recognized by the NDIS Procedures Board and the only one that has successfully completed the rigorous scrutiny of operations required for recognition by the National Cooperation for Laboratory Accreditation (NACLA).

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We're on the web!
www.forquality.org

Digital Forensics Quality Solutions (DFQS)

Offering computer forensics proficiency tests since November 15, 2007

DFQS is associated with the National Center for Forensic Science at the University of Central Florida (UCF)

To order tests and for additional information, go to the DFQS website at www.dfqs.org

Contact: **Carrie M. Whitcomb**, Director of the National Center for Forensic Science (NCFS) at UCF

Phone: 407.823.6469 E-mail: whitcomb@mail.ucf.edu

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Submissions should be sent to pcw@forquality.org

Submit an
article to
"the fqs
update"

"The FQS Update" is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December by Forensic Quality Services.

FQS welcomes submissions to this newsletter and will evaluate all such submissions with regard to their general interest to the readership. FQS reserves the right to edit submissions for length and editorial correctness. **Deadlines for submissions are March 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15.** Please send your submissions to pcw@forquality.org