Independence within the 4-Stage Clearance Process – Policy Review

The UKAS process for assessing and accrediting the 4-Stage clearance procedure was developed in consultation with stakeholders back in 2004. At that time it was acknowledged that although aspects of the clearance procedure were already covered by ISO 17025, other aspects were better suited to ISO 17020 (as inspection activities). Rather than split the accreditation of this procedure between the two standards it was agreed that accreditation would be granted to ISO 17025 although the key requirements from ISO 17020 would be built into the assessment. These requirements were published within Guidance for the 4SC pilot project, and later transferred to LAB30.

One of the clauses in LAB30 (17.2) makes it quite clear that an asbestos analyst cannot undertake clearance work for an organisation with which they have a relationship. In 2009 UKAS decided to review this policy to determine whether or not it was providing confidence in the impartiality of the 4SC procedure. As a consequence a proposal was tabled at the UKAS Asbestos Technical Advisory Committee in July 2009 to revise the existing policy. The proposal, which suggested removing the total prohibition in favour of controlled management, was discussed at length and as no consensus was reached it was agreed to allow HSE additional time to discuss this matter internally.

As one of the primary Regulators in this area, it is important to take account of the views of HSE, whose response was in favour of leaving the policy as it was, on the grounds that independence and impartiality of the analyst is seen as a key element in ensuring external influences are minimised.

The decision of UKAS following this review, taking into account the strong views of HSE and a lack of consensus with the TAC, was not to make any change to the policy as stated in LAB30: 17.2. Therefore the UKAS policy on requiring the analyst to be independent of the body commissioning the clearance remains.

17th February 2010

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