INDUSTRY GUIDE

working with NATA accredited personal protective equipment (PPE) testing laboratories

NATA | Accreditation Matters

the role of testing in supply decisions

Testing is a conformity assessment activity used to determine whether a product or material meets one or more defined criteria. The results of the test apply to the particular example of the product, or the sample of material, that actually underwent testing.

In some very specific cases where:

- A sample can reasonably be taken as being representative of a defined batch of material (e.g. it is demonstrably homogeneous); and
- The laboratory has control of the sampling in accordance with a validated plan or standard sampling method.

it may be appropriate to interpret the test result as being representative of the batch.

Except for such specific circumstances, a test result is specific to the sample or item(s) actually tested.

As such, basing the supply of a product to a market solely on a report of an initial test is a high risk approach unless there is a very high level of confidence in the reliability and consistency of production and of the integrity of your supply chain.

Whatever the case, any decision regarding the use of the test result is not one for the laboratory to make. The laboratory's role is to provide reliable data on which such decisions can be made.

Decisions on how a test result is to be used should occur down-stream in the supply chain (hopefully involving the purchaser) in order to ensure the interests of the purchaser and/or consumer are protected.

Certification bodies accredited by JASANZ, or a JASANZ Multilateral Arrangement (MLA) partner can play an important role in resolving the possible disconnect between individual test results and the commercial supply of products. Many product certification systems incorporate production tests and some require market surveillance in order to ensure that what goes into the market remains compliant with the relevant standard, code or specification.

Even where a product certification may be based on an initial or type test, a wise supplier will consider the product's risk profile and undertake an appropriate level of surveillance testing during its supply to market.

why use a NATA accredited laboratory?

NATA accreditation:

- is about confidence – yours and that of your customers – in the data and information on which you make informed decisions about your supply chains;
- is a procedure by which an authoritative body gives formal recognition that a body is competent to carry out specific tasks; and
- is a high level process of recognising collective, specific and demonstrated competencies.

The core of NATA accreditation is the third party, objective, peer assessment process at a scientific and technical level that provides assurance of the laboratory's capability to produce reliable data from particular tests.

NATA's accreditation criteria include the international standard ISO/IEC 17025 ***General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories*** which is used globally for the accreditation of laboratories.

In addition to confidence, NATA accreditation provides you with:

- an ability to outsource the monitoring of laboratory performance to an independent, objective authority;
- access to international arrangements providing for the mutual recognition of data produced by laboratories accredited by NATA and equivalent accreditation bodies globally; and
- a resource to resolve disputes relating to laboratory services.

what PPE testing activities can be accredited by NATA?

NATA accredits tests, measurements and examinations which, for these kinds of products, are performed in laboratories that may also test across a range of disciplines and a broad array of product types, including:

Surgical Masks - Levels 1, 2 and 3

Respirators - Classes P1, P2 and P3

Protective Clothing

Gloves

Eye and Face Protection

Depending upon the laboratory's needs and those of their customers, NATA will accredit for testing to Australian or joint New Zealand Standard, International Standards (ISO,IEC) and other recognised regional and national standards such as EN and ASTM.

is the laboratory accredited for what I need?

The tests for which an accredited laboratory has undergone peer assessment and demonstrated its competence and capability are detailed in a Scope of Accreditation. It should be noted that a laboratory may not seek accreditation for every service that it provides so it is important to check the Scope of Accreditation for what you need.

Scopes of Accreditation are publicly available documents and are your primary source of information about the capabilities for which the laboratory is accredited. They are available on NATA's website **www.nata.com.au.**

If having viewed the laboratory's Scope of Accreditation you still have questions, please contact NATA.

what do I need to specify?

Once you have ascertained that the laboratory is appropriately accredited, it is strongly advised that you make contact to ensure clarity around:

- why you need their services – e.g. one-off investigation, regulatory compliance, on-going routine production testing, market surveillance etc.;
- any specifics for sampling - your own or those relating to a standard/ specification;
- the standard, code or specification that is applicable to the product; and
- where appropriate, the test method to be used (if the standard, code or specification allows for options).

This gives the accredited laboratory a starting point for determining its ability and availability to undertake the work and, of course, work out the cost.

It is also important to specify that you require the results to be provided to you on a NATA-endorsed report. This provides assurance to you, a certification body (if applicable) and end customers that the testing has been performed in accordance with NATA's accreditation criteria.

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what do I do if my testing requirements change?

Where there is a standing arrangement or contract for samples to be routinely tested – such as under a certification scheme - you need to notify the laboratory of any changes to the requirements or to the product itself.

Laboratories will, however, contact the customer if the sample type changes or the integrity of the sample is in doubt.

Any material change to such a standing arrangement needs to be in writing and confirmed by the laboratory.

Samples

The best quality testing service available is effectively useless if samples are compromised by:

poor sample selection/ preparation;

inappropriate storage and transport (e.g. dust, water ingress, mechanical damage, decomposition); and

incorrect, incomplete or ambiguous identification.

It is stating the obvious, but samples supplied to a laboratory must be representative of the product that will be supplied to the market.

Compromising the integrity of the samples will waste everyone's time and money and may lead to compromised product going into the market.

"Samples tested as received"

This statement is usually applied to test reports when the laboratory has not been responsible for the collection of samples.

Use of this statement does not, however, remove the responsibility of the laboratory to test samples that are in a satisfactory condition.

Laboratories are required to have procedures covering the acceptance of samples for testing.

If a laboratory receives a sample that does not meet acceptance criteria, the laboratory must contact the customer and ascertain what action to take.

NATA-endorsed test reports

NATA's accreditation criteria details what needs to be included in a test report.

Nonetheless, customers should still check any test report received to ensure that:

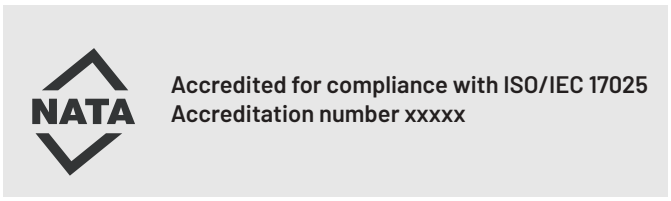
- it matches the sample(s) provided for testing and that the identity of that sample is clearly detailed on the report;
- it references the agreed standard, code, specification and/or test method;
- the results are reported in the manner prescribed by the applicable standard, code or specification;
- any statement regarding sampling reflects the arrangements as understood by the customer; and
- any additional information that you have requested is included, such as photographs of the test configuration.

Unless the laboratory performing the tests has been involved in the sampling, the report may include a statement to the effect that "samples were tested as received".

This indicates that the customer has been responsible for providing the samples to the laboratory in an appropriate manner.

NATA-endorsement what's the significance?

NATA-endorsement consists of the NATA logo, the laboratory's accreditation number and the International Standard with which the facility complies. This will be presented in a manner similar to the following.



If there is a need for international recognition of the reported results, the following statements may be added:

NATA is a signatory to the ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement for the mutual recognition of the equivalence of testing, medical testing, calibration, inspection, proficiency testing providers and reference materials producers reports and certificates

For you as the customer, the NATA-endorsement is there to provide prima facie evidence that the test results within the report have been issued under the laboratory's NATA Accreditation.

Similarly, product certifiers and your customers may share this confidence.

the issue of fraudulent reports

It is an unfortunate fact of life that falsification and unauthorised alteration of test reports is a growing issue for markets. We are well past the days of white-out and clumsy edits to critical numerical results as technology has made for extremely "high quality" fakes and alterations to be undetectable without forensic examination.

If you are going to rely on test reports supplied from somewhere up-stream in the supply chain, it is important to exercise care to ensure that the content is legitimate.

Even if you can ascertain that the report was produced by the laboratory from which it appears to have come, go further and make sure that it actually applies to the product with which you are dealing.

Such checks should always start at the source. Verify with the laboratory that it is in fact one of their reports and that the details of the product identified therein are those of any product you have at hand.

If doubt remains, contact NATA to discuss other possible avenues to verify the report's legitimacy.

communication is the key

The key to successfully gaining reliable data is effective communication between the laboratory and client.

Mutual understanding doesn't just happen, it must be pursued.
Two particular points to remember:

Initial clarity surrounding the purpose of the testing will aid all subsequent discussions and greatly improve the likelihood of obtaining the appropriate services.

Communication shouldn't be a once-off event. If you have questions upon receiving the test report, something seems odd or doesn't make sense, ask the laboratory.

help is available

NATA also recognises that despite best intentions and a robust accreditation system, things may go wrong. If you are experiencing difficulties with any NATA accredited laboratory and have not been able to resolve them through direct discussions, it is recommended that you contact NATA to discuss the general nature of any concerns. You should then follow this up with a written account of the issues. NATA has a comprehensive complaints handling process and treats any issues raised very seriously. We will of course respect confidentiality in dealing with any issues raised.

Please direct inquiries to:

PPE_testing@nata.com.au

summary

Why use a NATA accredited laboratory?

- 3rd party verification of capability and competence
- Compliance with international standards for laboratories
- International recognition of results

Is the laboratory accredited for the services I need?

- Ask the right questions regarding NATA accreditation
- Check the laboratory's Scope of Accreditation

What do I need to specify?

- All results to be NATA-endorsed
- The purpose of the test
- Applicable standard/specification
- When you need the results

summary

What is important with samples to be tested?

- They are fully representative
- Identification, traceability and labelling
- Maintaining integrity during transport

What should I do with my reports?

- Check that the report is clear and complete
- Make sure report is NATA-endorsed
- Take note of any comments
- Use the results to benefit your business!