

Results of the December 2023 Asbestos Proficiency Testing Participant Feedback



Background

In order to maintain our ISO17043 accreditation for the AIMS Proficiency Testing (PT) scheme, it is important that we continue to improve the service that we offer to participants. One way of recording PT participant satisfaction is to carry out feedback gathering exercises. This is the eleventh survey of this type that we have conducted. Details of the previous surveys are available on the PT section of the website (<http://www.hsl.gov.uk/proficiency-testing-schemes/participant-feedback>).

Survey

The survey was emailed to all asbestos PT participants, including (AIMS), Asbestos in Soils Scheme (AISS), Low Asbestos Content Scheme (LACS), Regular Inter-laboratory Counting Exchange (RICE) and Scanning Electron Microscopy Fibre Counting Scheme (SEMS). In total, the survey was sent to 497 participants by email, with 176 responding (35% response rate). One participant did not complete every question.

Results

From the 176 responses

- Q1. 86% participate in AIMS, 19% in AISS, 30% in LACS, 43% in RICE, 28% in SEMS.
- Q2. 37% of the responses were from the UK, 58% from Europe and 5% from Rest of World.
- Q3. 96% of responders find their samples/ slides to be of a suitable standard.
- Q4. 94% of responders receive their samples in a timely manner.
- Q5. 98% of responders found our answers to queries useful and informative.
- Q6. 95% of responders knew we have useful information available on the website, including the Information Book for Participants and Scheme Schedules.
- Q7. 97% of responders are happy with the timescales for submitting results.
- Q8. 98% of responders find our group reports useful and informative.
- Q9. 88% of responders know that we have a wide range of quality control samples available to purchase.
- Q10. There was also an opportunity to comment/make suggestions for the schemes (the main points have been listed below).

Customer Comments

Participants were given the opportunity to comment further on a few of the questions. Below are a few examples of the responses:

Q8. Do you find your scheme's Group Report useful & informative?

A few suggestions have been made to improve the information in group reports. Our Scheme Technical Managers will review these and put in place as deemed necessary.

Requests to receive AIMS reports more quickly:

- *Deadlines for result submissions have been extended to allow participants to receive their samples. Since Brexit, transporting overseas has become increasingly more difficult. Once all results have been submitted, they are collated and checked. Reports are issued two weeks after the deadline date.*

For RICE, a suggestion has been made to show Rogue slides on the provisional report (these are currently identified as 'candidate':

- *A request for this amendment has been passed to our software engineer.*

A comparison of AIMS analysis methods/ results over a 2-year period would be useful:

- *The scheme technical manager will review this request.*

Q10. Comments/ Suggestions regarding the Schemes.

A suggestion to have more low asbestos concentration samples for SEMS:

- *This will be reviewed by the scheme technical manager.*

Participants of LACS have enquired whether the quantitative element will be reintroduced:

- *The scheme will remain qualitative only for the immediate future. The PT Team will continue to investigate whether this scheme can be reintroduced in the future and at a reasonable cost.*

A suggestion to use standard amphibole asbestos in LACS samples (rather than UICC):

- *The scheme technical manager will review this request.*

General

- Since Brexit, there have been numerous delays in laboratories receiving their samples, especially overseas. It is vitally important that participants keep us up to date with their current address & contact details, provide their VAT number, EORI number (for European participants). If permits are required for your country, they must be passed to the PT Team prior to sample despatch. Unfortunately, customs may stop/ delay packages for a number of reasons - for which we have no warning or control. The PT have extended the results deadline date for AIMS, AISS, LACS & SEMS to allow time for samples to arrive with participants. Unfortunately, we are unable to extend the deadline dates for RICE due to the nature of the scheme. However, most overseas laboratories are the only one in their group, so if delays occur, we are able to extend their individual deadline accordingly.

Discussion

This is the eleventh feedback gathering exercise and the response rate remains high. The main aim of this survey was to determine if the schemes, and the process, are of an acceptable standard for our participants.

Participants have made very positive comments regarding the quality of the schemes and how they are administered. They have also provided valuable constructive feedback where they feel improvement could be made. Although not all answers to comments/ suggestions have been provided in this report, the survey has been collated and distributed within the team so that we're all aware of where we are doing well and where we could improve.

If anyone has raised a concern/ query on the questionnaire which hasn't been answered, please email the PT team who will be happy to provide further feedback.

We are continually striving to improve the quality of the schemes so this exercise will be carried out annually. Participants are reminded that they are welcome to provide constructive feedback at any time by emailing the PT administration team.

Outcome

The results, comments and feedback have been passed to the HSE PT team, PT Management Team and findings will be discussed at the next FPTSC meeting in June/ July 2024.