BEACON

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS BEACON?

Beacon is foundational system for municipal laboratory development that integrates quality assurance, analytical processes, process-control software, and service and support into one concise package. Beacon includes documents, software, worksheets, and training, so you can successfully develop your quality system and generate defensible data. In addition, you join a resource network of other Beacon users, allowing you to share questions and concerns with other municipalities. Beacon is the ultimate municipal laboratory package.

WHY WAS BEACON DEVELOPED?

Many state regulatory agencies have begun to require that laboratories reporting data for environmental monitoring be accredited. Preparing for accreditation can be daunting when added to the rigors of day-to-day operations. Laboratory procedures are becoming more sophisticated with the advent of better technology, and assistance is needed to stay current. The bar has been raised for data **and** for analysts. It is no longer acceptable to train an individual to repeat steps in a test robotically without understanding data objectives. Laboratory professionals need to be able to produce defensible data that can withstand ever-increasing legal review. That's where Beacon can help. Alloway has parlayed its 35 years of experience into a viable solution for today's environmental laboratory.

WILL MY LABORATORY NEED ACCREDITATION?

It depends on your state. Accreditation is a national trend that is gaining momentum. Several states are requiring accreditation and many more are auditing laboratories for compliance to national standards. Regulators and legal professionals scrutinize data for inconsistencies and weaknesses during litigation. Data that falls short will be highly publicized. Furthermore, data generated by laboratories are used by states to assign discharge limits, levy fines, evaluate water criteria, and set future water-quality goals. In other words: the status of accreditation requirements in your state **will not** prevent the critical review of your data.

HOW WILL BEACON HELP ME OBTAIN ACCREDITATION?

Beacon cannot guarantee that your laboratory will receive accreditation, but it will put your lab on the right track. Beacon was designed to follow national and state-recognized program requirements. Beacon contains the tools and training you will need, but you must commit to using these tools and responding to updates in order to obtain accreditation.

CAN I OBTAIN ACCREDITATION WITHOUT BEACON?

Yes, you can do all the work to obtain accreditation – provided you have the necessary time and resources. Not leaving enough time to implement a sound program before your next audit may compromise your ability to generate defensible data. Most accreditation programs specify goals to be attained, not processes to achieve goals. Beacon is a turnkey approach that can make the difference between attempting accreditation and becoming accredited.

CAN I DEVELOP THE TOOLS IN BEACON ON MY OWN?

Yes, you can develop your own tools. You will need to review the standards and develop an integrated quality system. The system will need to address document control, measurement traceability, method compliance, responses to out-of-control quality control, corrective actions, writing of method manuals, determination of detection limits, method validation, and more. But why reinvent the wheel? Beacon has been tested and proven successful.

HOW MUCH TIME WOULD IT TAKE ME TO DEVELOP THE TOOLS IN BEACON?

Beacon has been developed over a period of several years. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be written for each analytical test and for all other laboratory activities that impact laboratory operations or data quality. All of this must be done in context of an overarching quality system. Without a trained quality-assurance professional at the helm, developing a program similar to Beacon would be a vast undertaking.

Is it realistic to expect plant operators to develop their own system?

Operators are focused on performing tasks to meet immediate needs. A quality assurance system requires a great deal of time to prepare and implement. The training and experiences of plant operators are not good preparation for developing a quality system.

Are there alternatives to Beacon?

Yes and no. There are always different ways to resolve a problem. Beacon is the most complete option for municipal laboratory development. You could purchase templates for manuals or procedures, but these templates will leave you with extensive work to do on your own, and they may not be part of a complete system. Consultants are available to design a custom package, but a consultant will come at a premium cost far greater than the price of Beacon. Only Beacon provides a fully integrated system and in-depth training for a flat fee. Beacon is simply the best value for your money and the best use of your time.

Does a state agency endorse Beacon?

State agencies have **not** endorsed Beacon or any similar products or services. However, Beacon has been introduced to regulatory personnel in various states so they can be familiar with our product and goals. It is our responsibility to keep abreast of state and federal requirements. We listen to public comments, read published guidelines, and respond with changes. This program was introduced in Pennsylvania when it was undergoing statewide accreditation. All the municipalities that purchased this program passed their audits on the first try.

Why not send all my samples to another laboratory?

There is always a risk associated with accepting results from outside laboratories. Data generated by your laboratory are vital to the operation of your facility. Outsourcing samples can lead to delays, which can, in turn, delay plant operations. These delays can impact water quality, which may lead to permit violations. If your facility has the resources to do its testing in-house, it should. Beacon can help produce quality data and eliminate the headache of outsourcing samples.

How will Beacon adapt to changes in regulations?

It is our responsibility to keep Beacon current during your training period. When you purchase Beacon you can be assured that it has been designed to meet current expectations for compliance with regulatory standards. You receive one year of service and support, during which we will keep you informed about regulatory updates and changes. After one year, you will have the option to renew your contract for a support fee. Doing so will ensure that you stay up-to-date on regulatory changes and standards.

Why not wait until I have an order from the regulator to do something?

When an audit arises it is better to have been proactive than it is to be reactive. You will not have enough time to overhaul your laboratory to meet the rigors of an audit. Even if changes are implemented, they will not correct data that have already been generated improperly. Intentions will be of no value if data-quality problems are found.

Can I buy only certain components of Beacon?

Yes, components of Beacon can be purchased individually on our Web site: **www.alloway.com**

This is an option for facilities with access to individual(s) who may be able to develop their own quality system. Before selecting this option, be sure you can commit to completing the project. Once you have selected certain components, you will be expected to complete the project on your own.

How does the cost of Beacon compare to other expenses at a treatment plant?

The cost of Beacon is a function of the time expended on its development. Beacon's cost is less than the price of a good refrigerated auto sampler. While equipment will depreciate and need to be replaced, Beacon is designed to adapt to changes and remain viable for years to come. Beacon will also serve as a tool for training new personnel and as a model for system design throughout the plant. Some facilities have even found that Beacon has led to efficiencies of scale, as unnecessary activities have been eliminated.

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Alloway
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