

## Environmental laboratory mergers can mean more than a name change

As the nation's leading and largest environmental testing firm, EMSL's network of 22 laboratories has been providing quality analytical services since 1981. In recent times, much like banking/financial institution customers have experienced, environmental laboratory clients of other labs may have found themselves asking, "Who's who?"

For over two decades now EMSL has been leader in the environmental testing field. But with an array of name changes, acquisitions and mergers at other labs it has grown increasingly difficult to know which company is supplying your results and if you are getting the correct service you desperately need. In what might seem like a shell game, it's becoming harder to distinguish one firm from another. Perhaps you wonder if the quality and terms of the final product – the analysis – will be the same. If a problem should arise, do you know whom you should contact? Chances are it might not be whom you think?

Similar to a credit card holder who learns his bank has changed from the name appearing on the card in his hand, environmental laboratory clients might find themselves trapped between changing and merging firms. And like these merged bank accounts in recent years, with large institutions such as NationsBank, Bank of America, Fleet and Wells Fargo, clients might face new procedures, terms of service or pricing as a result of the acquisition.

Getting answers to questions regarding your bank account can lead to hours of telephone calls, faxes, email or letters to the lender. The same may be true of your environmental laboratory that handles your detection service. That means all the changes taking shape in the environmental laboratory community is not all that different from merging banks. In addition, it's becoming even more difficult locating a laboratory that can provide the array of services required in today's growing, ever-changing industry, while not compromising the product. With EMSL we provide materials testing, characterization and forensic laboratory services for a wide range of commercial, industrial, regulatory and law enforcement clients with emphasis on customer service.

This 'lab dilemma' has become apparent with recent acquisitions, mergers or name changes. For example, consider these recent changes: the Southeast based Hometest, Inc./METS Laboratories changed its name to Rx Solutions International, Inc. As for recent acquisitions, you'll find East Coast based SciLab integrated with AmeriSci and, more recently, the West Coast founded Environmental Microbiology Laboratory merged with TestAmerica Environmental Services. A change of the company logo on your billing statements might not be the only changes that have occurred so environmental laboratory customers should be aware.

Such rapid changes in the climate of laboratory services via acquisitions or mergers have left some lab-seeking professionals feeling that there could be clear quality implications. Not to say that merging labs will fail at your needed tasks or that you should submit your projects with caution, however, diligent research must be done as with any contractors associated with your business. Never assume the newly acquired lab follows the same SOPs (Standard Operation Procedures) or policies as your previous lab did because you may be grossly mistaken. That assumption might cost you in terms of time and money. The question that now remains is "How do I find out if a lab is right for me?"

### **Things you need to research**

Realize that your lab probably won't provide you a copy of their SOPs, but you certainly can request a copy of their 'Statement of Qualifications.' Be sure this document is current since the merger or acquisition took place. It should contain the most recent up-to-date information on the

company. A Statement of Qualifications should include educational background information on key analysts. It should also contain certifications, accreditations, and/or achievements each lab has received.

In addition to a quality statement, it is strongly recommend that you ask for case studies, or excerpts from past projects. A look into your lab's experience not only shows you the kinds of work they have expertise in, but it will also give you a glimpse of the methodologies and scope of projects they can handle. The lab you choose should fit your requirements and prior case studies in the same field will give you an understanding of how they operate.

Another key to uncovering the mystery of mergers is to visit the lab's corporate website. A good site should incorporate several principals. Information should be readily available and easy to navigate. It should be right at your fingertips. Web site content should be current and updated regularly. Visit the news section and see what statements, if any, they have made in the last few weeks or months. Something else to consider as you visit the site is contact information. Do they list an address and a phone number so you can make direct inquiries if need be or do they just have a 'one form serves all' page with little information on contacting them. Consider this: If you have trouble contacting them before they handle your project do you think your success rate will be any better after they get the assignment?

While visiting the site also be sure to take some time and complete feedback forms, download information, and review the content you've downloaded. It's imperative that you review the lab's information carefully. Never let it be said that thorough industry research is done in vain. The quantity, and quality, of the content found on your lab's website is another good way to measure your lab's ability to provide a quality analysis.

And lastly, call your lab on a regular basis. This is the single most important thing you can do to measure the future of your business relationship with your lab. Don't call to check up on a project you've submitted. Call to talk. Talk about your industry trends and their feeling on its direction. Talk about any trade publications they may have articles circulating in. If the customer service representative on the other end of the phone cannot help you, it may be time for you to ask yourself, "Does this lab think of me as their partner? Are they truly interested in me and my business?" or "Am I just someone asking too many questions?" A professional firm will always take the time to see that your needs are met so you feel like a patron and not a nuisance.

In searching for an environmental laboratory remember the following:

- Ask for a **Statement of Qualifications**
- Ask for **case studies** or excerpts from **past projects**
- Visit the **lab's corporate website**
- **Call your lab** on a regular basis

To surmise, the key to finding the right environmental laboratory lies in researching what companies are available and making an educated choice on what they offer. At EMSL we offer all of this and more. With all the changes happening in the market it's important to understand that the company you once did business with may now have different practices than in times past. The best way to ensure you get the best service for the best terms is to research and find companies that fit your needs today. Be sure to contact EMSL and compare. Our rapid turnaround and competitive prices make the dependable results you get that much more valuable.