International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation

The ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement

ilac

global trust

Testing – Calibration – Inspection

Enhancing the acceptance of products and services across national borders

Removing barriers to global trade

Accreditation allows you to make an informed decision when selecting a laboratory, as it demonstrates competence, impartiality and capability. Accreditation helps to underpin the credibility and performance of your goods and services.

Accreditation bodies around the world, which have been evaluated by peers as competent, have signed an arrangement that enhances the acceptance of products and services across national borders. The purpose of this arrangement, the ILAC Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA), (often referred to as the ILAC Arrangement) is to create an international framework to support international trade through the removal of technical barriers.

"Tested once, accepted everywhere"

In many economies there is an accreditation body recognised by government to carry out the assessment and verification against international standards of testing, calibration, inspection and certification activities in both the private and public sectors.

ILAC, the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation, is an organisation that counts as its members laboratory accreditation bodies representing over 70 economies and regional organisations. The ILAC MRA allows you to make use of a global network of testing and calibration laboratories that have been accredited to provide accurate and reliable results.

The MRA supports international trade by promoting international confidence and acceptance of accredited laboratory data. Technical barriers to trade, such as the retesting of products each time they enter a new economy would be reduced.

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How does the MRA benefit you?

For Government – The MRA provides governments with a credible and technically robust framework on which to further develop and enhance government to government bilateral and multilateral international trade agreements. The long-term aim is the fully accepted use and recognition, by both public and private industries, of accredited laboratories, including results from accredited laboratories in other countries. In this way, the free-trade goal of "a product tested once, accepted everywhere" will be realised.

For Regulators – The MRA acts as an internationally recognised 'stamp of approval' to demonstrate compliance against agreed standards and requirements. Consequently, risk is minimised, as decisions will be based on reliable test results. Duplication is also minimised as test and calibration data included in submissions for product approvals can be evaluated without re-testing. Many specifiers, such as government agencies, have recognised the importance of credible accreditation programs that are developed against internationally recognised standards. Accreditation and the ILAC MRA help regulators meet their own legislated responsibilities by providing a globally recognised system to accept accredited test reports.

For Industry users – The MRA ensures that businesses that depend on test and calibration data have greater confidence in the accuracy of the test and calibration reports they purchase, because they have been generated by facilities assessed as being competent to carry out these specific activities. Users should check the current scope of the laboratory's accreditation when purchasing such services.

For Manufacturers – The MRA ensures that manufacturing businesses can derive significant savings. Rather than bearing the costs of setting up internal assessments to confirm the quality of the testing and calibration results on their products, businesses can choose to defer to the assessments of internationally recognised competent accreditation bodies that are ILAC signatories, and in addition benefit from the market access the ILAC MRA provides.

For Consumers – The MRA provides additional confidence to the general public and consumers purchasing testing and calibration services on their sample, instrument or product. By insisting that the calibration or test results are from an accredited facility, they can be confident the laboratory has been assessed by an independent accreditation body, that itself has been recognised as meeting international standards of competence.

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How does the MRA work?

Acceptance of an accreditation body into the ILAC MRA is dependent upon being successfully evaluated by peers from other accreditation bodies in accordance with the relevant rules and procedures contained in ILAC publications. Each accreditation body that is a signatory to the ILAC MRA commits to:

- Maintain conformity with the current version of ISO/IEC 17011 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies providing assessment and accreditation of conformity assessment bodies and supplementary requirements documents.

- Ensure that all laboratories that are accredited comply with appropriate laboratory standards (currently ISO/IEC 17025 General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories and ISO 15189 Medical Laboratories – Particular requirements for quality and competence).

The ILAC MRA has been structured to build on existing and developing regional MRAs established around the world. Regional Cooperation Bodies who are operating a regional MRA, coordinate peer evaluations and thereby maintain confidence in the accreditation bodies that are signatories to the regional MRA.

In turn, each Regional Cooperation Body, that has been recognised by ILAC, must also abide by ILAC's procedures and requirements and undergo routine peer evaluations by members of another Regional Cooperation Body or ILAC.

Currently, the European cooperation for Accreditation (EA), the Asia Pacific Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (APLAC) and the Inter-American Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC) are the only ILAC recognised regions. This means that the mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) and evaluation procedures of EA, APLAC and IAAC have been peer evaluated by ILAC and deemed to be satisfactory. Recognised Regional Cooperations are re-evaluated on an on-going basis, over a 4 year period, ie all aspects of the Regional Cooperation Body's operation must be evaluated at least once every 4 years.

Accreditation Bodies who are Associate Members of ILAC and also signatories to the MRA of a recognised region are automatically eligible to become signatories to the ILAC MRA.

How does the MRA work? *continued*

Accreditation bodies that cannot be affiliated (for geographical reasons) with an ILAC recognised region, may apply directly to ILAC for evaluation in order to achieve signatory status to the ILAC MRA.

The Southern African Development Community in Accreditation (SADCA) is in the process of developing their respective MRAs and their associated evaluation procedures before seeking recognition with ILAC. Other regional cooperations in other parts of the world are in their infancy.

The end result of this network of mutual recognition, is that test reports and calibration certificates issued by facilities accredited by a signatory to the ILAC MRA, will be accepted by the other signatories to the ILAC MRA and in some cases (the number is increasing all the time) by government regulators and industry.

ILAC-MRA Mark

All ILAC Full Members (MRA signatories) are able to enter into a licensing agreement with ILAC to use the ILAC-MRA Mark in combination with their own accreditation body Symbol (otherwise known as a Combined MRA Mark).

Once licensed, ILAC Full Members can enter into a sub-license agreement with their accredited laboratories to also use the ILAC-MRA Mark in combination with the accreditation symbol that the accredited laboratories are entitled to use on their reports (otherwise known as the Laboratory Combined MRA Mark).

How does the MRA work? *continued*

Use of the Combined MRA Mark (used by accreditation bodies) and the Laboratory Combined MRA Mark (used by laboratories) is not mandatory and therefore laboratory reports and certificates, from accredited laboratories, may be seen with or without the Laboratory Combined MRA Mark.

Accreditation Bodies who are using the Combined MRA Mark, receive the benefits of being able to readily promote their international recognition status, and of being able to provide the same opportunity to their accredited laboratories. The accredited laboratories, who have been sub-licensed and use the Laboratory Combined MRA Mark on their test/calibration reports, are in turn able to receive the benefits of promoting their accreditation as being internationally recognised.

Maintaining the integrity of the MRA

In order to maintain the value and integrity of the MRA, all signatories have agreed to notify ILAC about any significant changes including:

- the status or operation of the accreditation body
- changes in name or legal/corporate status
- the establishment, revision, suspension or termination of any agreements
- changes in key senior staff or the organisational structure.

Each signatory to the MRA must also designate a liaison officer to ensure a consistent and effective channel of communication between the accreditation bodies.

Summary

The MRA promotes trust and builds confidence among accreditation bodies through their ability to determine a laboratory's competence to carry out testing or calibration. In turn, this confidence facilitates the acceptance of testing and calibration results between economies when the results can be demonstrated to have originated from accredited laboratories. The MRA is clearly supporting global trade by removing the need for retesting. Retesting every time a product enters a new market is expensive and time consuming and can be construed as a technical barrier to trade. ILAC is committed to its goal of achieving the principle of products and services being "tested once, accepted everywhere".

More information about ILAC and accreditation

ILAC is the peak international authority on laboratory accreditation, with a membership consisting of accreditation bodies and stakeholder organisations throughout the world. It is involved with the development of laboratory accreditation practices and procedures, the promotion of laboratory accreditation as a trade facilitation tool, the assistance of developing accreditation systems, and the recognition of competent test and calibration facilities around the globe. ILAC actively cooperates with associated international bodies in pursuing these aims.

The International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) first started as a conference in 1977 with the aim of developing international cooperation for facilitating trade, by promotion of the acceptance of accredited test and calibration results.

In 1996, ILAC became a formal cooperation with a charter to establish a network of mutual recognition agreements among accreditation bodies.

The ILAC Arrangement is the culmination of many years of intensive work. An increasing number of laboratory accreditation bodies have signed the ILAC, Mutual Recognition Arrangement to promote the acceptance of accredited test and calibration data. (A list of these signatories can be found on the ILAC website at www.ilac.org).

ILAC also publishes a range of literature on topics covering accreditation, testing, trade facilitation and related subjects. ILAC encourages the reproduction of its publications, or parts thereof, by organisations wishing to use such material for areas related to education, standardisation, accreditation, good laboratory practice or other purposes relevant to ILAC's area of expertise or endeavor.

Other brochures in this series are:

- Why Use An Accredited Laboratory?
- Why Become An Accredited Laboratory?
- How Does Using an Accredited Laboratory Benefit Government & Regulators?
- The Advantages of Being An Accredited Laboratory Laboratory Accreditation or ISO 9001 Certification

You will find them at: **www.ilac.org**

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