

Extra HEHF industrial hygiene lab celebrates two decades of accreditation

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In the July 1974 issue of its *Journal*, the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) published a list of the first 26 laboratories accredited under its new laboratory accreditation program. Included on that list, with ID No. 14, was HEHF's Industrial Hygiene Laboratory, then called the Environmental Health Sciences (EHS) laboratory.

Things were simpler then. The laboratory consisted of one analyst, one quality officer and one jack-of-all-trades.

The one in each case was Maureen Hamilton. Then, as now, the laboratory provided industrial hygiene and drinking water analytical support for the Hanford Site.

Hamilton developed the laboratory's operating procedures and quality assurance program, completed the accreditation application, and analyzed all proficiency analytical testing samples.

The association recognized her skill and the HEHF Industrial Hygiene Lab became the only accredited one-person lab.

Lab grows

Because she was just beginning her career in industrial hygiene, she did not have the

experience and certification credentials to be laboratory director.

That role was filled by Ralph Anderson, who was manager of the EHS department. Not too long after that, Pam Thurman joined the staff.

Two industrial hygienists provided support by analyzing 25 to 50 fiber count samples a year. Total analyses done by the EHS laboratory in 1974 were about 2,500.

Tough times

Hamilton and Thurman worked hard, at times in almost unbearable conditions. Heaters blasted cold air in the winter, rain dripped from electrical outlets overhead, dust blew from ceiling ducts. But somehow they persevered. Hamilton became the lab director and Thurman became the first laboratory supervisor.

By 1984 the EHS Laboratory had grown to a staff of four chemists and a half-time technician plus Hamilton, who was now the lab director as well as a practicing analyst.

By that time the laboratory had also been accredited by the Washington Department of Social and Health Services (now Department of Health) for bacteriological analysis of drinking water (1976) and chemical analysis of drinking water (1978). Total analyses performed by the laboratory in 1984 had increased to approximately 14,000.

Today the industrial hygiene lab has a staff of 20 chemists, technicians and support personnel under the direction of Dr. Joseph Samuels.

Hamilton remains with the lab as a principal chemist, providing quality, safety, training and technical support for the lab.

After a brief expansion into waste characterization and other environmental analyses during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the lab is once again focusing on the sole mission of providing IH and drinking water analytical support to the Hanford contractors.

Excellence continues

An additional accreditation for bulk asbestos analysis from the National Institute of Standards and Technology was added to the lab's credentials in 1989.

As the years have progressed, Hamilton and Thurman have submitted the AIHA accreditation continuation documentation every three years as required and have helped create the successes.

The tradition of excellence continues. The lab team was 100 percent acceptable on the AIHA proficiency analytical testing samples this spring. The lab expects to perform approximately 25,000 analyses in 1994. ■