

Certification of environmental samplers

From 2006, samplers can have their competence certified. Sampler certification is a new way to prove the competence of the sampler, and sampling by a certified sampler must meet high standards for quality and documentation.

Quality sampling is a prerequisite for accurate environmental monitoring and control. Sampling variability is generally much higher than the analytical variability, often by a factor of 100 or more for environmental monitoring and control.

Certification of samplers is one way to ensure and prove quality sampling. A Nordic sampler certification scheme is therefore established by Nordtest and will be ready for operation from 2006.

Why sampler certification?

Sampler certification is an asset for both sampling users and sampling providers:

- The certificate proves that the sampler is qualified and that sampling is done with recognised methods, adequate equipment, documentation and quality control.
- Certification of samplers proves sampling competence and is recognised nationally and internationally.

The sampler certification is backed by training and inspection schemes.

What is sampler certification?

A certificate is issued by an independent organization according to the rules established in the Nordtest Sampler Certification Scheme and in accordance with the international standard for personnel certification, ISO 17024.

To acquire a certificate, a sampler must:

- be trained, qualified and continuously updated for sampling,
- have access to adequate sampling methods and equipment, and
- provide documentation and quality control of the sampling

Accordingly, sampler certification is an obligation for both the sampler and the sampler's employer.

Scope of the sampler certification

In the Nordtest scheme, samplers can be certified for sampling of:

- Solid waste
- Soils
- Groundwater
- Bottom sediments

- Waste water
- Solid sludge

Samplers from the Nordic and the Baltic countries can currently be certified.

Requirements for certified sampling

In the Nordic countries, certified environmental sampling is recommended in Finland, and accredited sampling is required for some purposes in Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

With the current emphasis upon self-monitoring by e.g.: waste producers or industries, the requirement for independent control of the operator's sampling is increasing. Accordingly, controlled sampling is a requirement for operator sampling in the implementation of the EU landfill directive and personnel certification is one way of ensuring adequate self-monitoring of industrial emissions according to the EU IPPC directive.

Also, the current draft EU service directive, suggest e.g.: certification as an appropriate tool to ensure the quality of services offered in the European Union.

Certification or accreditation?

Personnel certification is simpler and also less demanding than accreditation. The emphasis in certification according to the Nordtest scheme and ISO 17024 is upon the qualifications of the sampler and upon the methods, equipment and documentation of sampling.

The emphasis in accreditation according to ISO 17025 is upon laboratory procedures and traceability and a full quality system compliant with the ISO 9000 series is generally required.

In addition to being the choice of sampling quality assurance, personnel certification may be the first step towards accreditation or may be part of the documentation of staff sampling competence for an accredited organisation.

How does certification work?

The certification process is simple with the steps shown on the figure overleaf.

Further information

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The scheme has been developed for Nordtest/Nordic Innovation Centre by a Nordic project group: DHI Water & Environment, Eurofins A/S, the Finnish Environment Institute, VTT, Islands Ministry for the Environment, DNV Consulting and the Swedish Geotechnical Institute.

The development has been done in cooperation with Nordic and Baltic stakeholders.

The certification process

