



# SAMPLE STABILITY

**The guidance issued by the Laboratory Committee of the European Cooperations for Accreditation, relates to the handling of samples prior to analysis and the effect of this on the validity of test results.**

The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) has strengthened its focus on deviating sample protocol. During the annual laboratory audits UKAS have placed a higher emphasis on Sample Stability as of September 2011.

ALS Environmental have improved the service we offer for Chemistry and Microbiology wastewater analysis by making changes to our working practices to ensure that the requirements of the 2011 guidance are met.

In UKAS' guidance note entitled "Guidance on Deviating Samples" it comments that where samples are not correctly preserved (for example where "they may have exceeded their maximum preservation time, ... are not cooled or have inappropriate headspace"), this "may jeopardise the validity of the reported test results". It states that where laboratories are "not critical about the samples they receive" in this regard, this "is not in the interests of the laboratories, their customers or other end-users of the test result(s)". UKAS go on to state that, "as an accreditation body, it will be strengthening its focus" on this area during assessment visits to laboratories, and, in particular, it will be reviewing "the inclusion of disclaimers in test reports" where preservation standards have not been met.

## Understanding Changes

We have made various changes to our working practices to meet the requirements of the UKAS guidance. The guidance will also have an impact on our customers working procedures and the key changes are outlined below:

- Customers are required to inform us of the date and time that each sample is taken;
- Samples must be stored in relevant containers and transported to ALS Environmental in appropriate conditions;
- Customers are required to provide samples in a timely manner. The samples must be taken within a sufficient timeframe in order for ALS Environmental to complete analysis before the Stability Period expires;
- If samples are received close to the Stability Period expiry date or where other appropriate requirements referred to above are not met, we will inform customers via our order acknowledgement documentation. If we do not receive contact from you within 24 hours we will proceed with the required analysis;
- Where we do proceed, we will need to place an appropriate disclaimer on the report. For example, where then sample is analysed outside of the Stability Period, the disclaimer on the report will state this and a comment of "This sample has been analysed outside recommended stability times. It is, therefore possible, that the results provided may be compromised".

