



Engineering Sciences Section – 2008

C27 So, You Didn't Think You Needed to Dot That I?

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The goal of this presentation is to clearly demonstrate the importance of accurate documentation, and the potential consequences of not tending to even minor details.

The presentation will impact the forensic science community by sharing this case study, which will point out the crucial importance of accurate documentation and reporting, including what may seem like minor details, by analytical laboratories. This is also more broadly applicable to any forensic occupation.

Lack of attention to details, unintentional or otherwise, can have dire consequences. This presentation considers the case of a laboratory that sought help from another laboratory for water sample analyses when their instrument went down. Problems arose when it was determined that the first laboratory not only reported the results as their own work, but also made some significant changes. Subsequent legal actions against the first laboratory ultimately led to conviction of the laboratory owner on charges that may surprise you.

The year is 1998. Samples are piling up at Jekyll Labs, but their instrument is down. Holding times are looming, and the requested EPA 601/602 analyses need to be done soon. So, Dr. Jekyll sends them off to his friend at Hyde Analytical, following the time-honored tradition of subcontracting in a pinch. Problem solved. Well, maybe not. It seems that Mr. Hyde's 601/602 instrument is down, too. When Mr. Hyde offers to do EPA 624 analyses instead, though, Dr. Jekyll heaves a sigh of relief and accepts. Crisis averted? Well ...

Fast forward to 2002. Now the federal government is asking questions about misrepresented results, using the wrong method, and even fraud. What happened? It seems that Hyde's analytical reports came back listing analysis by EPA 624, but Jekyll's reports to their clients show analysis by EPA 601/602 ... and then there's the little matter of the analyte lists not matching... and, oops, some of the detection limits are different. Is it a big deal? Apparently so: big enough to get an indictment against the boss at Jekyll Laboratories, take it all the way to trial, and get a conviction.

Documentation and reporting – the devil really is in the details. *Caveat venditor!*

Subcontract, Litigation, Fraud