

# Results of the December 2024 Asbestos Proficiency Testing Participant Feedback



## **Background**

In order to maintain our ISO17043 accreditation for the AIMS Proficiency Testing (PT) scheme, it is important that we continue to improve the service that we offer to participants. One way of recording PT participant satisfaction is to carry out feedback gathering exercises. This is the eleventh survey of this type that we have conducted. Details of the previous surveys are available on the PT section of the website (<http://www.hsl.gov.uk/proficiency-testing-schemes/participant-feedback>).

## **Survey**

The survey was emailed to all asbestos PT participants, including (AIMS), Asbestos in Soils Scheme (AISS), Low Asbestos Content Scheme (LACS), Regular Inter-laboratory Counting Exchange (RICE) and Scanning Electron Microscopy Fibre Counting Scheme (SEMS). In total, the survey was sent to 481 participants by email, with 190 responding (40% response rate). Five participants did not complete every question.

## **Results**

From the 190 responses

- Q1. 89% participate in AIMS, 20% in AISS, 30% in LACS, 44% in RICE, 32% in SEMS.
- Q2. 36% of the responses were from the UK, 58% from Europe (ex UK) and 6% from Rest of World.
- Q3. 97% of responders find their samples/ slides to be of a suitable standard.
- Q4. 97% of responders receive their samples in a timely manner.
- Q5. 99% of responders found our answers to queries useful and informative.
- Q6. 94% of responders knew we have useful information available on the website, including the Information Book for Participants and Scheme Schedules.
- Q7. 97% of responders are happy with the timescales for submitting results.
- Q8. 98% of responders find our group reports useful and informative.
- Q9. 89% of responders know that we have a wide range of quality control samples available to purchase.
- Q10. There was also an opportunity to comment/make suggestions for the schemes (the main points have been listed below).

## **Q4**

For 2024/25 we extended the scheme deadline dates (except for RICE) to assist with delays due to courier transportation. For RICE, we have tried to allocate all overseas laboratories in a group on their own. In December 2024, 97% of participants advised they received their slides/ samples in a timely manner compared to 94% in 2023.

The majority of overseas laboratories are the only one in their group, so if delays occur, we are able to extend their individual deadline accordingly.

The PT Team understand that some laboratories with a high number of RICE counters can struggle with the deadlines. We are working hard to try and achieve one laboratory per group so that in the future we can have longer timeframes for result submissions.

## Q8. Do you find your scheme's Group Report useful & informative?

A few suggestions have been made to improve the information in group reports. Our Scheme Technical Managers will review these and put in place as deemed necessary.

### LACS

Laboratories would like the estimate of asbestos in the samples to be included in the group report.

- *The Scheme Technical Manager will include in future reports*

### SEMS

A suggestion has been made to add the method and magnification details to the score table in appendix 1 of the Group Report.

- *The Scheme Technical Manager will review*

### RICE

A suggestion has been made for the online system to automatically calculate the density for the participant.

- *Discussions have taken place with our Fibres Proficiency Testing Steering Committee (FPTSC), including a UKAS representative. It has been noted that the calculation of the density should be carried out by the laboratory as part of the PT test, and not to be calculated by the software.*

## Q10. Comments/ Suggestions regarding the Schemes.

A request for a PT Scheme for the 'Determination of settled fibrous dust on surfaces by SEM' (scanning electron microscopy)

- *There have been discussions regarding this scheme and how the samples can be produced. Laboratories will be notified if this scheme is available in the future.*

A request for a PT Scheme for road asphalt and rocks that naturally contain asbestos.

- *We have previously looked into offering a scheme of this nature, but have not yet found a viable way to produce the samples.*

A request for a PT Scheme for 'Measurement of asbestos in construction and demolition waste and recycling materials produced thereof' (VDI3876)

- *This has been discussed within the PT Team. If a scheme is viable, we will notify all participants.*

A participant has asked for realistic AIMS samples

- *We try as much as possible to make the samples as realistic as possible regarding material types. Although we appreciate some of the asbestos quantities and rarer fibre types would not typically be seen by most surveyors. For example, we have previously included cat litter as it is made from a mineral that can (and has) contained asbestos.*

Participants have asked for information regarding scoring, sample parameters etc.

- *This information is available in the scheme Information Books for Participants, available in the Useful Links section of the scheme page of the internet: [AIMS](#), [AISS](#), [Low Asbestos Content Scheme \(LACS\)](#), [RICE](#), [SEM Fibre Counting Scheme](#)*

A participant has queried the payment options for the schemes.

- There are two options:
  - Worldpay (credit/ debit card) – a VAT receipt, suitable for accounting purposes, is available as soon as payment has been received. Schemes and QC samples are offered at a reduced rate
  - Invoice – our invoice procedure is quite lengthy (4-6 weeks) and can be paid by credit/ debit card or bank transfer

- Annual subscriptions are available annually from January and full payment is required before samples can be despatched.

A participant has asked for samples with 0.1% asbestos present

- *there are a wide range of asbestos quality control samples available to purchase. You can find further details in our AIMS QC Information, available on our website page: [PT Quality Control Samples](#)*

A participant has asked for samples which include the rarer asbestos types for Quality Control purposes.

- *You are able to purchase PT040 – Past AIMS samples. These are past AIMS round samples which you are able to choose the asbestos type/ matrix from a picking list. These include the rarer asbestos types. Further details in our AIMS QC Information, available on our website page: [PT Quality Control Samples](#)*

## **Discussion**

This is the twelfth feedback gathering exercise and the response rate remains high. The main aim of this survey was to determine if the schemes, and the process, are of an acceptable standard for our participants.

Participants have made very positive comments regarding the quality of the schemes and how they are administered. They have also provided valuable constructive feedback where they feel improvement could be made. Although not all answers to comments/ suggestions have been provided in this report, the survey has been collated and distributed within the team so that we're all aware of where we are doing well and where we could improve.

If anyone has raised a concern/ query on the questionnaire which hasn't been answered, please email the PT team who will be happy to provide further feedback.

We are continually striving to improve the quality of the schemes so this exercise will be carried out annually. Participants are reminded that they are welcome to provide constructive feedback at any time by emailing the PT administration team.

## **Outcome**

The results, comments and feedback have been passed to the HSE PT team, PT Management Team and findings will be discussed at the next FPTSC meeting in March/ April 2025