

FDLE Seized Drugs Accreditation and Job Overview

ANAB Accreditation Facts Related to the Seized Drugs Section

FDLE's laboratory system is accredited by ANAB (American National Standards Institute National Accreditation Board). ANAB, a non-governmental organization and the largest accreditation body in North America, assesses various types of laboratories to ensure they meet specific technical qualifications and competence for conducting various types of testing. The Seized Drugs section is independently assessed on its ability to maintain quality control checks on all instrumentation and techniques utilized, the thoroughness of its training program, and its consistency for controlled substance analysis.

The Seized Drugs section utilizes widely-accepted techniques and instrumentation that are deemed reliable by the scientific community. Some of these techniques include mass spectrometry, gas chromatography, infrared spectroscopy, and microscopy. Mass spectrometry and gas chromatography have both been in use for over a century, with infrared spectroscopy having been in existence for almost nine decades. However, the discipline uses the latest iterations of these instruments available for purchase in today's market. All standards used for comparison purposes are independently verified external to FDLE in order to properly report the identification of such substances. All equipment and instrumentation undergo rigorous quality control checks. Additionally, all balances and microscopes are inspected and maintained by independent companies to guarantee they are in the best working order.

To ensure consistency within the Seized Drugs section and proper adherence to standard protocols and accreditation requirements, every case is peer-reviewed. Additionally, every laboratory is audited internally and every analyst is tested for proficiency on an annual basis. Internal audits involve the inspection of a laboratory and review of random cases by members from outside of that laboratory. Proficiency test samples are given to each analyst to test their ability to properly identify an unknown. Analysts are also required to undergo continuing education and refresher courses, such as training in safety and ethics.

Members of the Seized Drugs Section

The Seized Drug section employs Forensic Technologists (FT), Crime Laboratory Analysts (CLA), and Senior Crime Laboratory Analysts (SCLA). The primary FT duties are to prepare reagents in the section, maintain balances, and transfer evidence to and from analysts. They are also responsible for Public Records Requests and maintaining quality control records. The main duties of a CLA are to analyze items of evidence for the presence or absence of controlled substances, generate reports, and testify in court. SCLAs are CLAs with nine or more years of experience who often serve as principle instructors for CLA trainees. Both CLAs and SCLAs maintain instruments within the section by performing preventative maintenance and quality control checks. Analysts in the Seized Drug Section also provide input on method development and updates to standard operating procedures as needed to keep up with changes to the Florida Statutes.

Analysts in the Seized Drug Section routinely provide expert testimony as a part of their duties. An expert witness can be defined as a person who is allowed to testify at a trial, because of special knowledge or proficiency in a particular field that is relevant to the case, and can offer opinion testimony based upon their training, experience, and education, whereas lay witnesses can only testify to information or facts that they have personally observed or heard. On average, an analyst will testify three to four times a month, at trials, depositions, and hearings. The analysts must be able to provide clear, accurate, and objective testimony. An expert witness needs to be comfortable explaining complex

scientific topics to the jury using layman's or easy-to-understand explanations and must present information in an unbiased and impartial manner.

Prior to being hired in the Seized Drug section, an applicant undergoes an extensive background check to include employment history, credit checks, personal references, a criminal history check, and drug testing. A background check is necessary due to the nature of the evidence submitted to the laboratory along with the trust that is placed in them to be truthful and objective in the judicial process. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement's objective is to confirm the applicant is ethical and confident in their abilities to ensure the trust of the public.

Seized Drugs Training Program:

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement Seized Drugs training program is a year-long intensive curriculum that covers every aspect of forensic chemistry drug examination. It was originally based on the training program for a Forensic Chemist with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration and has been modified throughout the years. The current training program consists of two phases and numerous assessments which include practical, written, and oral tests. The training is overseen by a committee consisting of a principal instructor, the Seized Drugs Technical Leader, and another experienced analyst within the discipline.

The first phase of the training program is split into modules that include historical background, ethics, instruments, analytical techniques, and controlled substances grouped into classes. During this phase the trainee conducts independent study and participates in classroom style training and practical exercises with instructors and peers. In the second phase, the trainee participates in a period of supervised casework with an experienced Seized Drug analyst. Courtroom demeanor and etiquette are also a part of phase two.

Upon successful completion of the training program, a Crime Laboratory Analyst will be able to produce the highest quality work product. This includes analyzing evidence for the presence or absence of controlled substances while observing quality control, maintaining instrumentation, and following standard operating procedures. They also produce accurate reports to their findings and testify in court as needed.