



Chain of Custody

Definition

Chain of custody is the protocol that provides a record of the persons having control of and access to a sample. The chain of custody begins when the sample is collected and ends when the sample is disposed of. If the analytical results for a project are questioned, the chain of custody documentation is the record that proves the sample was collected and handled according to specifications and that the sample can be directly linked to the analytical results.

Background

There are two general types of chain of custody: routine and legal or evidentiary. The type of custody needed depends on the project-specific requirements or data quality objectives, and should be specified in project planning documents, such as quality assurance project plans (QAPPs).

A routine chain of custody is designed to verify the integrity of a sample by providing records that trace the sample from collection and storage to handling, shipment, and analysis. This information combined with field records

identifying sampling personnel; equipment; field conditions; and collection, storage, and transfer techniques are what make up the chain of custody.

Legal chain of custody includes the same general requirements as routine chain of custody, but it is specifically designed to provide a record that may be produced as evidence in legal proceedings. As such it may have special requirements, which differ from state to state and from project to project, including the use of specific types of sample collection labels and forms, additional sample security requirements, and other procedures. Note that a legal chain of custody can be significantly more time-consuming and costly to generate and maintain than routine chain of custody, and it is not necessary for most projects.

Chain of Custody Process

The sample collector is responsible for maintaining sample custody until the samples are transferred by a dated and signed chain of custody form to a commercial shipper, or delivered and transferred directly to the laboratory.

