

Water Sciences Section (WSS) Laboratory Sample Prioritization Policy

This is a restatement of the WSS Laboratory policy regarding samples and their sample analysis priority.

Our goal at the WSS Laboratories is to analyze all samples as quickly as possible without jeopardizing data quality, and always within the published holding time. There are a number of factors which may affect routine turnaround times including, but not limited to, sample load, transport, preparation, extraction time, clean-up, troubleshooting/re-analysis, data evaluation and reporting. Routine samples are batched for cost and resource efficiency.

Occasionally, samples must be given higher priority and this document outlines the WSS laboratories policy on sample prioritization. Sample collectors are asked to first ask for approval from their supervisor to designate a sample as an “emergency”, and second, to limit using the emergency designation to only those samples where immediate turnaround is required. Analysts are required to keep alert for emergency samples and where emergency samples are in the analytical and reporting process.

Note: The Chain of Custody (COC) designation does not impart any priority in terms of order or turnaround time of analyses; COC simply ensures the integrity of the sample through traceable documentation of possession and handling of the sample from time of collection through the process of sample submission and analysis and review.

Priority of samples for processing is listed below, the top being the highest priority.

- Office of the Secretary Priority Samples
- Emergency Samples
- Routine Samples

Samples designated as priority by the Office of the Secretary and Emergency samples preempt all other routine sample analyses even if it means those routine samples will not meet the required hold time. The immediate WSS laboratory unit supervisor is contacted whenever events beyond lab staff control occur and prevent Office of the Secretary Priority or Emergency samples preparation and or analysis within 24 hours of receipt. This alert to the unit supervisor prompts immediate communication between the supervisor and the collector.

Timely communication is important between analyst and supervisor as well as supervisor and collector for the following reasons:

- a. Critical decisions may be hinging on those sample results. For example: A homeowner’s water supply well has suspected volatile organics contamination and decisions must be made quickly regarding the necessity of a health risk assessment or whether it is safe to consume that water.
- b. Timely communication may also enable the collector to resample, if necessary.

For routine samples, the laboratory unit supervisor is immediately alerted when an event occurs such as equipment failure, weather, additional runs are required, etc., which will prevent timely turnaround of sample results. The unit supervisor then makes contact with the sample collector.

In addition, samples will at times present very unusual results. While reviewing data if unusual results are found, the results and information are shared with the supervisor as soon as possible. Examples of unusual samples results are: high levels of Cyanide in a water sample, high level contamination in blanks, etc. Once again, the supervisor is notified immediately. When notified of unusual findings, supervisors can then communicate results and provide consultation to the collector.