

Workshop on Public Sector Food Safety

Data Collection, Access and Sharing

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eLEXNET – Frequently Asked Questions

(as edited from the eLEXNET website)

What is eLEXNET?

The Electronic Laboratory Exchange Network (eLEXNET) is a seamless, integrated, web-based information network that allows health officials at multiple government agencies engaged in food safety activities to compare, share and coordinate laboratory analysis findings. eLEXNET is the data capture and communication system for the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). eLEXNET provides the necessary infrastructure for an early warning system that identifies potentially hazardous foods and enables health officials to assess risks and analyze trends.

What are Some of the Benefits of eLEXNET?

Some benefits of eLEXNET include:

- Fostering online collaboration among food safety professionals across the US
- Providing robust On-Line Analytical Processing (OLAP) and Geographical Information System (GIS) collaboration tools to analyze food safety relationships and look for patterns, trends and exceptions
- Providing access to a repository of test methods that allows laboratories to review, evaluate and determine the most appropriate method for a particular use.
- Streamlining and improving food safety testing efforts through increased data sharing and collaboration across the federal, state and local government agencies
- Enhancing communication and collaboration among food safety agencies so that they can more easily perform risk assessment analysis and locate problem products
- Involving federal, state and local food safety partners in forming standards for food safety data elements, test methods, data sharing, and electronic data submission

How Does eLEXNET Help Food Safety Professionals?

eLEXNET can provide numerous benefits to the nation's food safety professionals, ranging from laboratory directors, analysts and food inspectors, to regulatory scientists, policy analysts, and risk assessors.

How Does eLEXNET Support the Food Emergency Response Network?

eLEXNET is the primary data exchange and communication system for the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). eLEXNET houses FERN related documents and Interim Counterterrorism Methods for FERN laboratories. FERN journals can be used as a communication tool and a central location to check for information regarding FERN activities. For more information about FERN, contact the FERN National Program Office at orahqfernnp@fdagov.

Who Can Participate in eLEXNET?

All federal, state and local food safety laboratories are eligible to participate in eLEXNET. At this time, private and academic organizations may not join eLEXNET or access the data. Participants may access eLEXNET via password-protected user accounts on the Internet and view food sample and analysis data from all participating laboratories, using integrated reporting and mapping tools.

What is the Cost of Joining eLEXNET?

The system does not require that member laboratories purchase any software or hardware or modify their existing information technology infrastructures. The only cost of membership is submitting data in a timely manner. The eLEXNET Program Office provides individual technical assistance and training, free of charge, to laboratories interested in joining.

Whom do I Contact to Obtain More Information on Joining eLEXNET, Submitting an Enhancement Request, or Reporting an Issue?

To obtain more information on joining eLEXNET, scheduling a remote on-line system demonstration or submitting an enhancement request/issue, please contact the eLEXNET Help Desk at eLEXNET_Help@bah.com.

How do Laboratories Submit Food Safety Data to eLEXNET?

Laboratories can join and benefit from eLEXNET regardless of their existing infrastructure and level of automation. Laboratories with their own electronic information system repositories submit their data electronically. Other laboratories that do not have electronic data repositories or choose not to extract data directly from them submit their sample and test data for selected analytes using eLEXNET's web-based data entry module. The eLEXNET Program Office provides individual technical assistance to laboratories interested in joining.

How Many Laboratories are Participating in eLEXNET?

eLEXNET continues to draw interest and momentum from the food safety community. As of October 2006, 107 laboratories are participating in eLEXNET by submitting food-testing data.

What Analytes Does eLEXNET Currently Support?

eLEXNET captures data for Microbiological Analytes, Antibiotic Residues, Chemical Compounds, Mycotoxins, Naturally Occurring Toxins, Parasites, Radionuclides, and Toxic Elements. eLEXNET houses over 3700 analytes and more than 800 detailed test methods.

What is the Latest Version of eLEXNET?

As of September 2006, the latest production release is eLEXNET version 5.0.

Will eLEXNET Expand Internationally?

Health and food safety officials in Canada and Mexico have expressed interest in participating in eLEXNET, and the eLEXNET Program Office is facilitating their efforts to join.