

A Day in the Life of an Assessor

Posted: October 2010

6:15 A.M.

RING! RING! RING! - The hotel wake-up call abruptly starts my morning routine. In a familiar hotel room, but unfamiliar city, I groggily roll out of bed. So starts another day as an AASHTO re:source Laboratory Assessor on the road. I have to remind myself where I am - I'm just outside of Chicago today. Luckily I got in early enough yesterday to get settled in and this morning is starting off pretty well. Before I head to the laboratory, I grab a quick bite to eat.



Normally I am limited to the hotel's breakfast or a stop at a grocery store to find something quick and easy to eat. This morning I take advantage of the free buffet in the hotel. It's a small perk I enjoy for being a Platinum Rewards member. After breakfast I'm off to find the laboratory with my best friend in tow, the GPS unit. Depending upon how recently this area has undergone major construction, a GPS unit can be extremely helpful. At other times, in other cities, the unit is my worst enemy.



8:00 A.M.

Arriving at the lab, my first order of business is the opening meeting. This allows both parties to get acquainted with each other. Introductions are followed by a review of each test the lab will run. This overview helps ensure a smooth assessment. Since I have performed all of these tests before, I can understand how nervous some technicians get with somebody watching their every move. Trying to alleviate some of this stress, I remind the staff to perform the tests as if I'm not even there. After the opening meeting, a review of the facilities, and agreement on a work schedule, the assessment begins.

I have a general idea of how long the assessment will last. The time allotted for the assessment depends on the type and number of tests that are being assessed. I use my training and experience to set a good pace for the testing portion of the assessment. When the laboratory technician takes a break, I use the time to check over equipment.

12:30 P.M.

The laboratory technicians recommend a great place for lunch; I just love Mexican food. It is nice to get out of the lab and enjoy a small part of the suburbs. Today, Chicago is definitely living up to its "Windy City" nickname. But the fresh air is welcome, and I look forward to seeing more of the city tonight.

1:45 P.M.

It's hard keeping the momentum of this morning, but we make it through the rest of the tests. After the test methods are assessed, I move onto the other half of the assessment. This part includes reviewing the laboratory's Quality Management System and its accompanying records of training, calibration, and standardization. Like laboratories, no two quality systems are ever the same. Nevertheless, just like during the test portion of the assessment, I am trained on what to look for and the importance of specific elements within the records.

Today's assessment is only a day long, but others can last up to five days. Each day covers another portion of the assessment. Since the assessment is complete, I conduct a close-out meeting. It is here that we go over and discuss some of my initial findings. The lab receives information on how to address any issues I have found during the assessment. I also go over the timeline for the next steps in this process.

4:30 P.M.

Leaving the lab after a long day of work, I return to the hotel to finish up paperwork and consider what to do this evening. Tired, hungry, and in an unfamiliar city, I can take the option of room service or venture out and find something on my own. The weather is nice and lunch was good, so I think finding a great place closer to the city will be a good idea. Lunch and dinner are great ways to get a taste of the local flavor, and the lab staff tipped me off to a little pizza place near Wrigley Field. I can't be in Chicago and not try some deep dish pizza.

**5:45 P.M.**

After taking the train into the city, I decided to try to get tickets to the Cubs game - might as well have the full Chicago experience. I pick up my tickets and then head off to find that pizza joint the lab recommended. I have just enough time to eat (the pizza is great - deep dish is fast becoming my new favorite) and make my way back to stadium for the game.

9:30 P.M.

The Cubs lost, but my seats were good and the game was fun. I have definitely enjoyed my time in Chicago. I hope to come back when I have more time to explore the city and what it has to offer. I make my way back to the hotel and set up tomorrow's wake-up call. It will be an early morning yet again.

Tomorrow I hit the road again. It's off to the next city and the next laboratory to repeat the process. Although I do have fun on the road, it is important to stay focused on the task at hand and always be prepared for what tomorrow might bring.

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