

Benchmark Six – A new idea to monitor analytical lab data reliability

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In the quest for perfection in an imperfect world, the analytical industry has learned to live with imperfections, whether they are human or technical. Analytical results reflecting the true metal content of a sample are crucial in making decisions that could eventually lead to investments worth millions of dollars. Benchmark 6 is a new concept that hopes to take out some of the uncertainty involved in analytical results by acting as a “Consumers Report” to analytical labs. The goal of its founders is to help the mining industry access information that is clear, simple, technically sound and authoritative.

R. Mohan Srivastava, president of Benchmark Six, addressed a small gathering in what was an inaugural launch of the company. The company’s display room was open for the day and was structured to be informal. A number of speakers were available for short presentations. There was then a chance for participants to ask questions and discuss the Benchmark Six concept.

The first speaker, Marc Legault, vice president project development for Agnico Eagle Mines, was interested in the concept of Benchmark Six. He believes this is a win-win situation for companies and individuals who need to get more information on assaying. The second speaker was Doug Hartzell, director of operations for Benchmark Six.

Hartzell emphasized that this was a launch and that Benchmark Six is open to ideas and feedback from the industry.

After the presentations several members of the analytical laboratory community had questions for Hartzell. Russ Callow of SGS laboratories addressed the issues of collection of data and evaluation of the commercial terms of contracts between labs and their clients.

Hartzell assured everyone that data used by Benchmark Six to evaluate the accuracy of assays would come not from the lab but from the companies getting assays done and allowing Benchmark Six to use the data. Comparing items such as client terms, costs and turnaround times between a lab and its client was proprietary and would never be released by the lab, according to Callow.

Hartzell seemed to backtrack on this issue by saying today was an inauguration and that Benchmark Six is open to discuss what kind of information can be used. The company is looking for feedback from the industry at this early stage in its life.

It appeared to be a tentative start for the company. To help get its message across, there were a number of speakers throughout the day from different aspects of the industry, including controversial geologist John Felderhof and his lawyer Joseph Groia. Even if Benchmark Six can’t convince the analytical industry to get on board, it will doubtless garner attention by the spokesmen it has selected.