
Technical Procedure for Balances

1.0 Purpose - This procedure specifies the required elements for the calibration and use of individual, analytical, and bulk balances.

2.0 Scope - This procedure applies to all electronic balances in the Drug Chemistry Sections of the State Crime Laboratory.

3.0 Definitions

- **Calibration** - Checking or adjusting (by comparison with a standard) the accuracy of a measuring instrument. Calibrations are performed by approved service contractors for all balances in the State Crime Laboratory Drug Chemistry Section.
- **Performance verification** - The initial confirmation of the reliability of a previously or externally validated method or instrument.
- **Primary reference standard weights**– Reference standard weights which have documentation issued by an approved vendor authenticating the calibration status.
- **Quality control (QC) Check** - Periodic confirmation of the reliability of equipment, instrumentation, and/or reagents
- **Reference Standard** – Measurement standard designated for the calibration of other measurement standards (reference standards or equipment)
- **Secondary reference standard weights** – Reference standard weights, used in the course of casework, that have the calibration status verified by comparison to primary reference standard weights.

4.0 Equipment, Materials and Reagents

4.1 Equipment

- Mettler Models: Toledo PG5002-S, Toledo XS6002-S (Forensic Scientist Assigned)
- Mettler Model PM4600 (Forensic Scientist Assigned and Toxicology)
- Mettler Toledo ML54 (Analytical Balance – Drug Chemistry and Toxicology)
- Mettler Model AE163 (Analytical Balance)
- Mettler Model AL 104 (Analytical Balance)
- Mettler Model ML 104 (Analytical Balance – Toxicology)
- Ohaus Champ II Scale (Bulk Balance)
- Ohaus I-10 Scale (Bulk Balance)

4.2 Materials and Reagents

- Weighing boats
- Paper, boxes, plastic bags or other weighing vessels
- Reference standard weights

5.0 Procedure

5.1 Standards and Controls

5.1.1 New balances

5.1.1.1 New balances shall be installed and leveled according to manufacturer's specifications. A calibration shall be performed by an outside vendor prior to use.

5.1.1.2 Prior to being used for casework, all new balances in the Drug Chemistry Section shall undergo the procedure for the yearly balance study (see the [Procedure for Measurement Assurance](#)).

5.1.1.2.1 This procedure shall be performed by the Balances Coordinator (or designee) and documented as the Performance Verification.

5.1.2 QC Check

5.1.2.1 Table Top Balances Assigned to Forensic Scientists and Toxicology Unit

5.1.2.1.1 The Forensic Scientist or designee in the Toxicology Unit shall perform a monthly QC check on the table top balance using the 0.10, 1.00, 10.00, 100.00, and 1000.00 gram reference standard weights.

5.1.2.1.2 Results of the QC check shall be documented in the Resource Manager section of FA.

5.1.2.1.3 Acceptable ranges for reference standard weights used for QC checks shall be calculated by adding and subtracting the values for Highest Expanded Uncertainty at 99.7 % Confidence Level for each model. See the Drug Chemistry Measurement Assurance Yearly Report for current values.

5.1.2.1.4 The user shall ensure the balance is clean, level, and properly functioning before use each day it is used for casework.

5.1.2.1.5 At the beginning and end of each work day, a QC check using one reference standard weight shall be performed on the balance.

- Results of these daily QC checks shall be recorded on a paper log and maintained by the Forensic Scientist in possession of the balance, or by the Toxicology Unit.
- These checks are only required for days when the balance is used for casework.

5.1.2.2 Bulk Balances

5.1.2.2.1 Bulk balance(s) shall have a monthly QC check performed by the Balances Coordinator (or designee) using two reference standard weights.

5.1.2.2.2 Results of the QC check shall be recorded in the Resource Manager section of FA.

5.1.2.2.3 Prior to each use for casework, bulk balance(s) shall have a QC Check performed by the Forensic Scientist using one reference standard weight.

Note: In the case where only one set of weights is obtained by the laboratory (bulk balance weights), they shall be considered primary weights that may be used for casework.

5.1.2.2.4 A reference standard weight should be selected based on the weight of the item of interest.

5.1.2.2.5 Results of the one point check shall be recorded in the case file.

5.1.2.2.6 Acceptable ranges for reference standard weights used for QC checks shall be calculated by adding and subtracting the values for Highest Expanded Uncertainty at 99.7 % Confidence Level for each model. See the Drug Chemistry Measurement Assurance Yearly Report for current values.

5.1.2.3 Analytical Balances (Drug Chemistry and Toxicology Unit)

5.1.2.3.1 Analytical balances shall have a monthly QC check performed by the Balances Coordinator (or designee) using three reference standard weights.

5.1.2.3.2 Results of the QC check shall be recorded in the Resource Manager section of FA.

5.1.2.3.3 Prior to each use for casework, analytical balance(s) shall have a QC Check performed by the user using one reference standard weight. A reference standard weight should be selected based on the weight of the item of interest.

5.1.2.3.4 Results of the one point check shall be recorded in the case file for Drug Chemistry, or in Resource Manager for the Toxicology Unit.

5.1.2.3.5 Acceptable ranges for reference standard weights used for QC checks shall be calculated by adding and subtracting the values for Highest Expanded Uncertainty at 99.7 % Confidence Level for each model. See the Drug Chemistry Measurement Assurance Yearly Report for current values.

5.1.2.4 QC Checks are to be performed for all balances according to working instructions for each specific balance type.

5.1.2.4.1 If results are within the range for the model, the balance may be used for casework.

5.1.2.4.2 If the results are outside these parameters, the balance shall not be used until all necessary steps have been taken to bring the balance into compliance.

- Steps may include cleaning, leveling, re-taring, or contacting the Section Balances Coordinator who can then contact an approved ISO accredited outside vendor.

5.2 Calibrations

5.2.1 Calibration for all Drug Chemistry Section balances shall be done on a yearly basis by an approved ISO accredited outside vendor.

5.2.1.1 Certificates of Calibration issued by the approved ISO accredited outside vendor shall be maintained in Section records by the Balances Coordinator.

5.2.2 Recertification for primary reference standard weights used in the Drug Chemistry Section shall be completed every three years by an approved ISO accredited outside vendor.

5.2.3 Secondary reference standard weights shall be checked annually, during the month of September, against the primary reference standard set of weights. See the [Procedure for Measurement Assurance](#) for requirements of a successful recheck and documentation procedures.

5.2.4 Reference standard weights calibration certificates shall be filed and maintained by the Balances Coordinator in each Laboratory.

5.2.5 When a Drug Chemistry Section balance has been placed out of service (e.g., maintenance/calibration, or malfunction), correct operation shall be demonstrated by a performance verification.

5.2.5.1 This evaluation shall be conducted according to the monthly QC Check as outlined above.

5.2.5.2 This evaluation shall be done prior to the balance being used for casework and it shall be documented in the Resource Manager Section of FA.

5.2.5.3 Laboratory personnel shall examine the effect(s), if any, of a malfunction on analysis results and implement the Procedure for Corrective Action as required.

5.2.6 Balances that have been used for casework, but are not currently assigned to a Forensic Scientist, are placed out of service. Balances not in service at the time of the yearly balance study are not included in the data collection process.

5.2.6.1 The procedure for the yearly balance study (see the Procedure for Measurement Assurance) shall be performed by the Forensic Scientist being assigned the balance and documented as a Quality Control Check before the balance is placed back into service.

5.3 **Sampling** - See [Drug Chemistry Section Administrative Procedure for Sampling](#).

5.4 **Application of Procedure on Evidence**

5.4.1 Choose desired units of measure according to balance instructions. (Record weights from bulk balances in kilogram units only. Do not use the pound setting on the balances. See "Calculations" **5.5** below for conversion factors.)

5.4.2 Tare the weighing boat or other weighing vessel that will hold the evidence.

5.4.3 Remove the tared weighing vessel from the balance.

5.4.4 Remove evidence from packaging material, if possible, and place in/on the tared weighing vessel.

5.4.5 Return the tared weighing vessel with evidence to the balance pan and record weight observed from the balance.

5.4.6 Note in the FA case file if gross weights are recorded.

5.4.7 For weights received, record in the FA case files all digits displayed by the balance.

5.4.8 For returned weights, replace the weighing boat or other weighing vessel back on the balance without taring and record all digits displayed by the balance.

5.4.9 Record the weight of material to be returned in the FA case file.

5.5 **Calculations**

5.5.1 When a trafficking amount of Marijuana is reported, the weight shall be reported in kilograms with the appropriate uncertainty of measurement, and converted to pounds since the NC General Statutes are written with threshold levels of pounds.

5.5.2 When conversion of kilograms to pounds is needed, the following NIST Conversion factor shall be used:

5.5.2.1 1 pound = 0.45359237 kilograms

5.5.2.2 Truncate the value for pounds to the tenths decimal place and report original weight and Uncertainty of Measurement information in kilograms.

Example:

Marijuana – Schedule VI.

Net weight of material – 23.72 (+/- 0.01) kilograms (52.2 pounds)

5.6 Reporting

5.6.1 When net weights are reported, the following shall be included on the report:

- A notation that a net weight is being reported.
- All digits displayed on the balance.
- The corresponding calculated uncertainty for that measurement.
- Example for an individual top-loading balance:
Cocaine – Schedule II
Net Weight of Material – 1.25 (+/- 0.0X) gram(s).
(See the [Procedure for Measurement Assurance](#) for current uncertainty.)

5.6.2 When gross weights are reported, the following shall be included on the report:

- A notation that a gross weight of contents and packaging is being reported.
- The truncated value for the digits displayed on the balance.
- No measurement assurance values (calculated or reported).
- Example for an individual top-loading balance:
Cocaine – Schedule II
Gross weight of contents and packaging – 1.2 grams.

5.6.3 Uncertainty of Measurement – The uncertainty of measurement shall be calculated by the following formula:

$$U_{\text{final}} = \sqrt{(U_{\text{balance}})^2 \times N}$$

Which can be simplified to

$$U_{\text{final}} = \sqrt{N} \times U_{\text{balance}}$$

Where

U_{final} = Final uncertainty for the measurement process

U_{balance} = Total Expanded Uncertainty

N = number of weighings

(See the [Procedure for Measurement Assurance](#) for current Uncertainty values.)

6.0 **Limitations** - If the balance does not read to the hundredths place due to units chosen (e.g., bulk balances) or due to the quantity of material being weighed, record in the case file all digits displayed on the balance.

7.0 **Safety** - Make sure balance is plugged in and is not near a source of water.

8.0 References

Operator Manuals for each balance model.

Moffat, A.C., et al., eds. *Clarke's Isolation and Identification of Drugs*. 2nd Edition. London: Pharmaceutical Press, 1986.

Butcher, K.S, et al., ed. *The International System of Units (SI) – Conversion Factors for General Use*. National Institute of Standards and Technology, NIST Special Publication: U.S Department of Commerce, May 2006: 11.

Virginia Department of Forensic Sciences. Controlled Substances Procedure Manual. Document 221-D100 Revision 7, February 6, 2012.

9.0 Records

- Certificates of Calibration for balances
- Certificates of Calibration for reference weights
- QC Check entries in Resource Manager section of FA

10.0 Attachments - N/A

Revision History		
Effective Date	Version Number	Reason
09/17/2012	1	Original Document - Technical Procedures L-01 through L-05 combined for conversion to ISO Standards.
02/15/2013	2	<p>4.1 - Added equipment models for Western Regional Laboratory.</p> <p>5.1.1.1 - Added "A calibration shall be performed by an outside vendor prior to use."</p> <p>5.1.2.1.5 - Section added requiring a daily QC check with one reference standard weight.</p> <p>5.1.2.2.4 and 5.1.2.3.3 - modified statements to represent all three laboratories.</p> <p>5.1.2.4 - Removed work instructions applicable to only Raleigh Laboratory.</p> <p>5.5.1.2 - Removed example and made statement applicable to all three laboratories reference rounding and reporting.</p>
05/10/2013	3	<p>5.3 - Revised name of Sampling Plan from Technical to Administrative Procedure</p> <p>5.5.1.2 – Replaced "round" with "truncate"</p>
05/22/2013	4	<p>Definitions – Added primary and secondary reference standard weights definitions</p> <p>5.2.2 and 5.2.3 - Added reference primary/secondary weights and recheck schedule</p> <p>5.2.4 Added in each Laboratory</p> <p>Original 5.2.2.1 – Deleted</p>

07/31/2013	5	5.1.1.2, 5.2.3, 5.6.3 – Updated name of Procedure for Measurement Assurance 5.6.1 – Added bullet point for reporting of net weights 5.6.2 – Added requirements for reporting of gross weights
11/15/2013	6	Added issuing authority to header.
04/18/2014	7	5.2.6 - Added section to clarify putting unassigned balances back into service
08/29/2014	8	Equipment List – Edited/rearranged to reflect current data. 5.1.1.2.1, 5.1.2.2.1, 5.1.2.3.1, 5.1.2.4.2, 5.2.1.1, 5.2.4 – Changed Balances Key Operator to Balances Coordinator. 5.1.2.1 and 5.1.2.3 – Added references in these sections and their subparagraphs for “table top balances”, and “Toxicology Unit.” Changed “Forensic Scientist” to “user” to accommodate Chemistry Technicians as well as Forensic Scientists. 5.1.2.2.3 - Clarified bulk balance primary standard weights. 5.1.2.3.4 – Added reference to Resource Manager for Toxicology Unit. 5.5 – Clarified procedure for conversion/reporting kilograms to pounds.