

From sample reception to test report emission: how our customers can help us to optimize the lead time

Catas staff

February 2020

For some time now CATAS has implemented a system to analyse the customers' satisfaction for our services. One of the few complaints are about the lead time to obtain the test reports. This time might be determined by the actual duration of the test, in which case no margin of improvement is practicable; or it might depend on the testing capacity. CATAS invests constantly on new equipment units to address these needs. Sometimes, though, the lead time is longer than necessary due to difficulties in processing the test order. In this, our customers might help us a little.

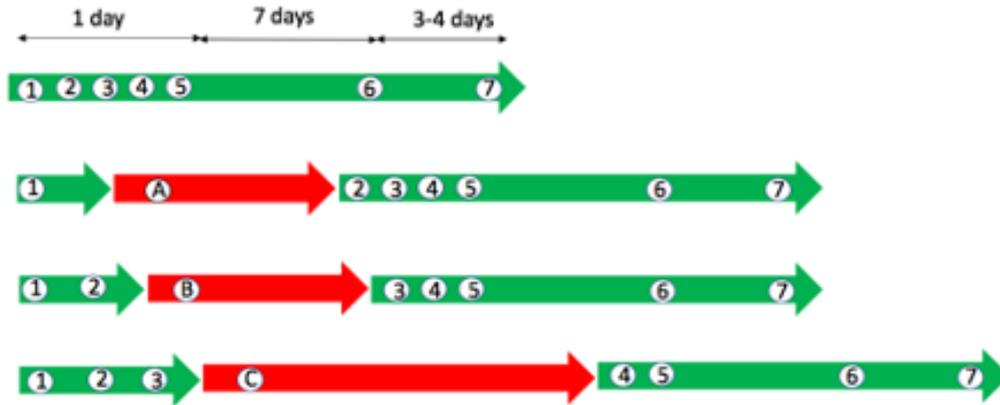
Here below a few precautions are listed which, when adopted, help us hugely and allow us to speed up the tests.

1. Clearly address the package to the department and to the person in charge, that is the person with whom you are in contact regarding the test. The address must be visible outside the package. CATAS consists of several departments; packages can be sorted out rapidly only if addressed to the correct department and technician. Otherwise, they will stay on hold at the reception.
2. Prepare separate packages with samples for different departments. It is not necessary to make separate shipments, as long as inside the package, individual parcels for the different laboratories are correctly identified and addressed.
3. Always enclose in the package the test order form, or test quotation, or a reference to email communication or web order. Samples received without an order cannot be processed!
4. Customers that do not make web orders should send the order beforehand by email to their contact person. This will help us to manage the orders in electronic format.
5. Web orders make the registration of samples much easier for us, thus speeding up the entire process. We strongly encourage our subscribed customers to use this option, that offers many advantages to the customers as well (register at the link <http://my.catas.com/registration>).
6. Fill in the test quotation or the order form in its entirety, always specifying the sample name and the resistance class (when required). Date and sign the documents, both on paper and in electronic format. An unsigned document cannot be accepted.
7. Whenever possible, follow the sample size and quantity requirements specified in the test quotation. Oversized samples must be sent to the sawmill to cut them to the required size; this will delay the lead time of several days. Exceeding material must be disposed of, which takes time, energy and money. On the opposite, samples that are too small or too few, make it impossible to carry out the tests. The technician has to email the customer and inform him/her that additional samples are required, which must be sent with another shipment. All these facts delay the processing of orders.
8. Avoid to wrap each individual sample with plastic foil. We sometimes spend comparatively more time trying to undo tightly foil-wrapped packages without damaging the samples, than we spend on testing! Carboard packaging is safer for sample protection. Furthermore, reducing the plastic packaging is good for the environment.

The diagram below shows how much each of these actions contribute to the overall time necessary to process an order. The example relates to the typical pathway of a sample for surface testing, but a similar situation happens, except for the test duration, in the other departments.

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1. The package is delivered at the reception.
2. The package is identified and assigned to the department and person in charge, based on the indications found outside the package.
3. The sample is registered and scheduled for testing as indicated in the test order form.
4. At the same time, the sample is checked for defects, size and quantity, and if suitable, it starts conditioning.

Steps 1 to 4 are completed on the day of sample reception.

5. The sample undergoes conditioning before testing – 7 days according to IKEA specifications; may be different with other specifications.
6. Testing starts. Surface resistance tests take 2 to 4 days (excluding artificial weathering tests, that have different duration).
7. The sample is assessed and the test report is issued.

Steps 5 to 7 are completed within 10-15 working days with 7 days conditioning.

This flow relates to correctly prepared samples, that can be immediately sorted out, comply with size and quantity requirements and are not damaged.

However, the lead time can be considerably longer if one or more of the following situations occur.

A – there is no indication visible outside the package as to the department or person to whom the sample is addressed. The sample cannot be assigned and is held in stand-by until the customer has been contacted to provide details. It normally takes 2 to 4 days until the sample is finally assigned to the person in charge.

We recommend to clearly indicate outside the package to which department and person it is addressed. It is important that samples are addressed to the person who is in charge of the tests requested.

B – The package does not contain a test order, nor reference to a web order or email communication. Or, the test order is not filled in correctly (missing sample name, inaccurate reference to test method, etc). The sample cannot be filed nor scheduled for testing. In this case the technician contacts the customer by email and waits to receive the missing information, which might arrive very quickly, but it generally takes 2 to 4 days until the sample can be linked to an order and processed.

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We recommend to clearly identify and associate each sample to an order, whether it is a paper or web order, a signed quotation or a file sent by email.

C - Samples are damaged, or they are much larger or smaller than required, or there are too many or too few pieces. All these situations slow down the processing of the order. Samples exceeding the size required for testing are sent to the sawmill to be reduced, which delays the process by 5/6 days. If the size or quantity of samples are not suitable, the customer must be informed and has to ship additional samples. The process is delayed indefinitely, until the additional samples are received.

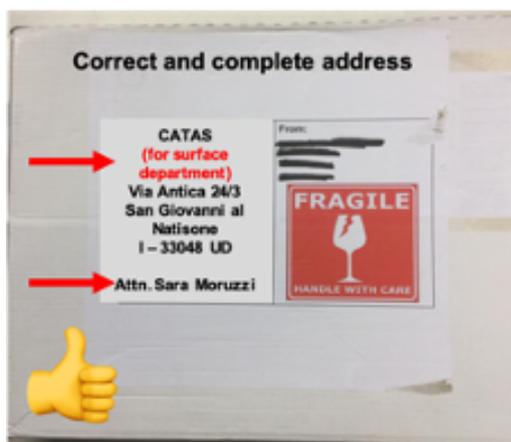
We recommend to follow the indications given with the test quotation on sample size and quantity. Large panels are more easily damaged during transport. It is advisable to cut them to the required size before shipping.

We will never tire of pointing out that it is useless to send more material than is strictly necessary for the test, as the excess material is immediately sent for disposal, and cannot be used to repeat a failed test.

It must be said that many of our customers already implement these recommendations: our thanks to them!

We hope this short article will be useful to those who still have doubts on how to organize the preparation of the samples, because, by following these simple rules, they will help us offer them a faster and more efficient service.

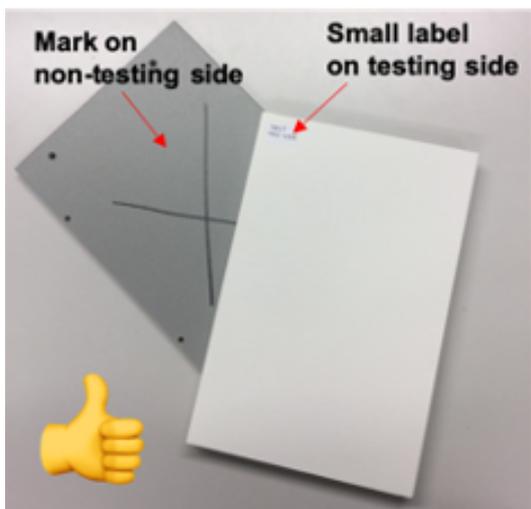
WHERE TO ADDRESS THE PARCELS?



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IDENTIFICATION OF THE TESTING SIDE:



HOW TO WRAP THE PANELS?



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TEST ORDER FORMS:



QUANTITY OF SAMPLES AND PARCEL SIZE (both negative examples):



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