

# The Hidden Cost of Calibration Non-Compliance in Regulated Industries



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## The Real Cost of Non-Compliance in Critical Sectors

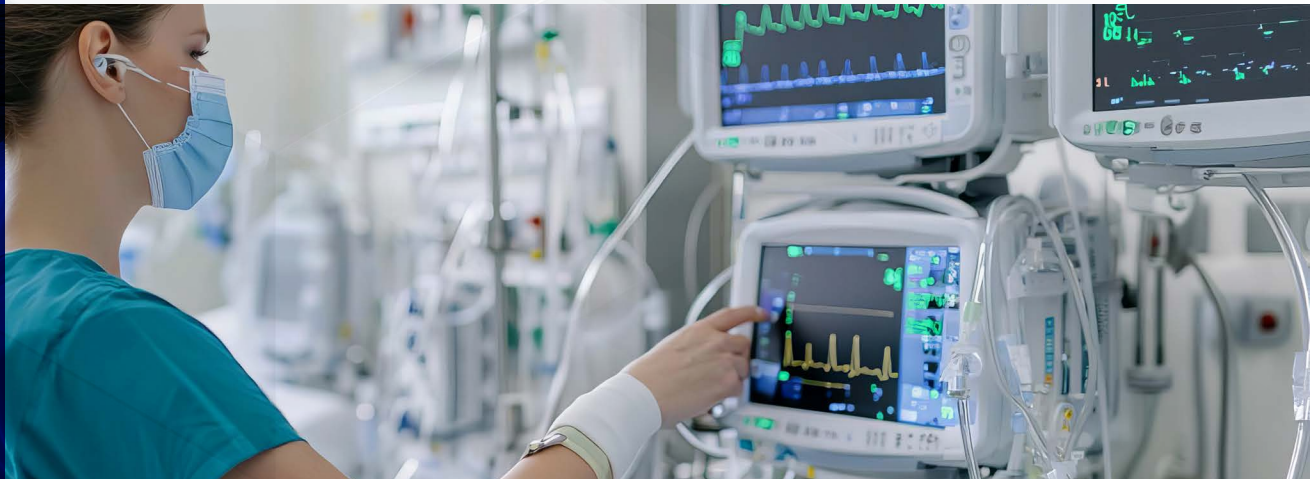
When a ventilator delivers the wrong dosage, when a diagnostic tool misreads lab results, or when a flight navigation system drifts slightly off course, the consequences aren't just technical. They're human. In sectors where precision underpins safety, even the smallest calibration error can have life-altering, or life-ending, effects.

But the risks don't stop there. What begins as a missed calibration can cascade into a full-blown operational crisis: halted production lines, failed audits, regulatory penalties, and loss of customer trust. Agencies like the FDA, FAA, and ISO aren't just checking if calibration was done—they're demanding proof that it was done right, on time, and with full traceability.

What often flies under the radar are the hidden costs: delays that disrupt supply chains, errors that derail market launches, reputational hits that take years to repair. These aren't just growing pains. They're symptoms of a compliance strategy that's fallen behind.

Calibration shouldn't be background noise. It's a critical control point and one that deserves more attention than it usually gets.

This ebook breaks down the true cost of calibration non-compliance and outlines how organizations can shift from reactive fixes to resilient, forward-looking strategies.



## Understanding the Compliance Landscape

For organizations in regulated industries, compliance isn't optional; it's the ground rules for doing business. And nowhere is that more evident than in calibration. It's the thread that ties safety, quality, and accountability together. However, understanding what regulators expect and how those expectations continue to evolve is crucial to staying ahead of risk.

Whether you're building medical devices, launching aircraft, or manufacturing life-saving pharmaceuticals, there's a network of global and national standards watching how you calibrate, document, and maintain control over your equipment.

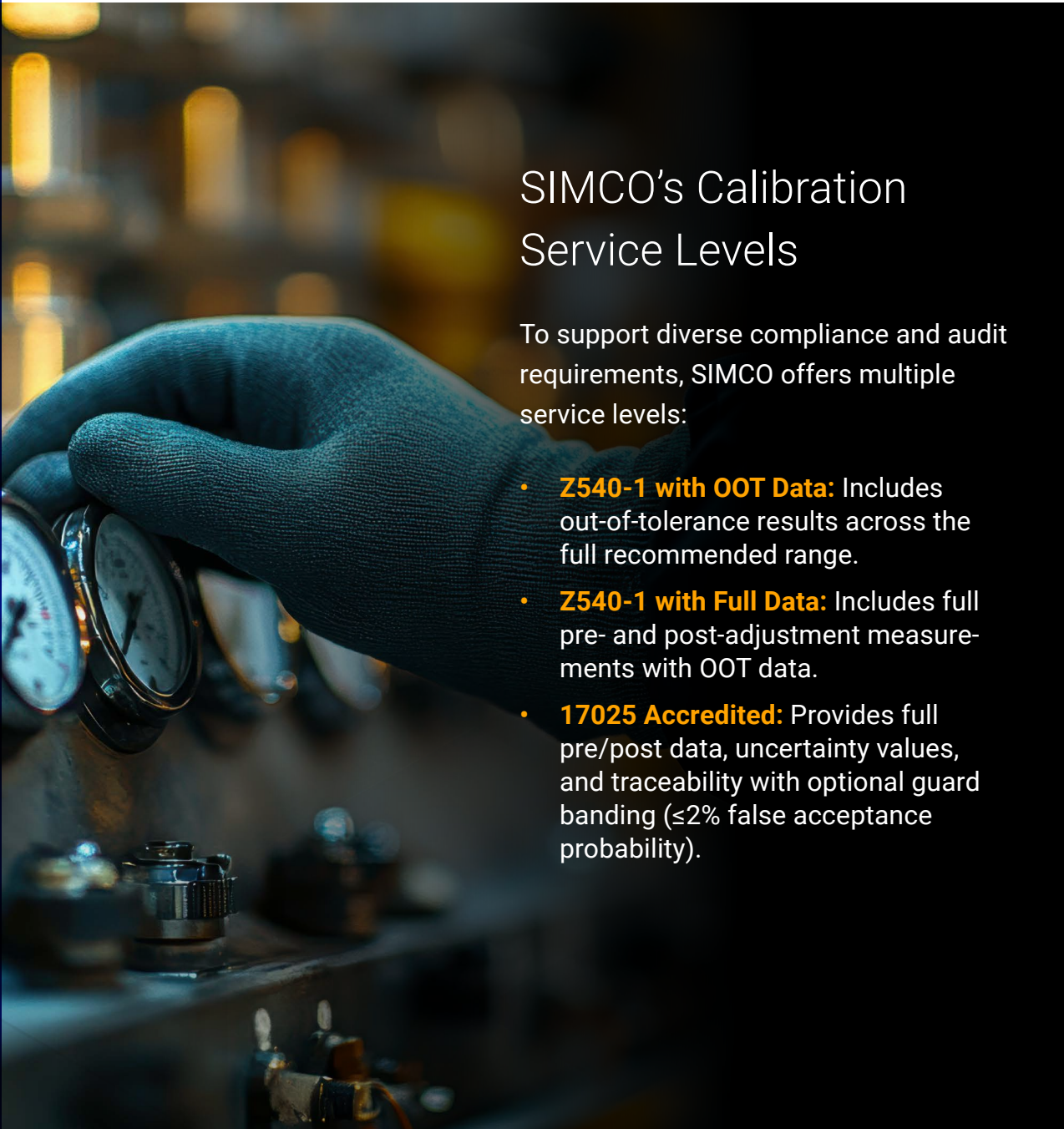
### Here's what's at stake:

- **FDA 21 CFR Part 820** requires documented calibration and maintenance procedures for all measuring and testing equipment used in regulated environments. It mandates traceable standards, defined intervals, and immediate remediation when instruments fall out of tolerance.
- **ISO 9001** demands a structured quality management system, including processes to ensure consistent measurement and traceability throughout your operation.
- **ISO 13485** takes those principles further, focusing on the safety and performance of medical devices. It requires rigorous calibration controls throughout the product lifecycle, because in this space, failure isn't an option.
- **FAA regulations** insist on full traceability for aviation systems, where even the smallest drift in a calibration reading can have catastrophic consequences.
- **ISO/IEC 17025** sets the global gold standard for calibration labs, requiring not just accurate results, but proof: validated uncertainty measurements, technician competency, and traceability all the way to national metrology institutes.



It's not just about proving you did the work. It's showing, with confidence, that you did it right, on time, and in a way that can stand up to scrutiny.

And it's why every calibration event must come with the full package: as-found and as-left data, traceable references, uncertainty analysis, technician credentials, and easy access to the records. Because when auditors arrive, they aren't looking for guesses—they're looking for receipts.



## SIMCO's Calibration Service Levels

To support diverse compliance and audit requirements, SIMCO offers multiple service levels:

- **Z540-1 with OOT Data:** Includes out-of-tolerance results across the full recommended range.
- **Z540-1 with Full Data:** Includes full pre- and post-adjustment measurements with OOT data.
- **17025 Accredited:** Provides full pre/post data, uncertainty values, and traceability with optional guard banding ( $\leq 2\%$  false acceptance probability).

## The Real-World Consequences of Calibration Non-Compliance



When calibration fails, it's a technical issue, but it's also a chain reaction that can compromise safety, stall operations, and drain resources. And in regulated industries, those consequences unfold fast and publicly.

Consider a blood gas analyzer in a hospital that drifts just slightly out of spec. The readings look normal, but they're not. A patient receives the wrong diagnosis, or worse, the wrong treatment. Or take an aircraft navigation system that isn't calibrated precisely. That drift might go unnoticed until it causes a deviation that risks passenger safety. These aren't rare edge cases; they're the real risks of relying on equipment that hasn't been properly calibrated or properly documented.

But even when no harm occurs, the regulatory and operational fallout is often severe.

Miss a calibration interval, and it's not just a line item—it can be grounds for an FDA warning letter or ISO nonconformance. If documentation is incomplete, you may be forced to pull the product, halt production, or even shut down a facility while everything is revalidated.

## Eli Lilly

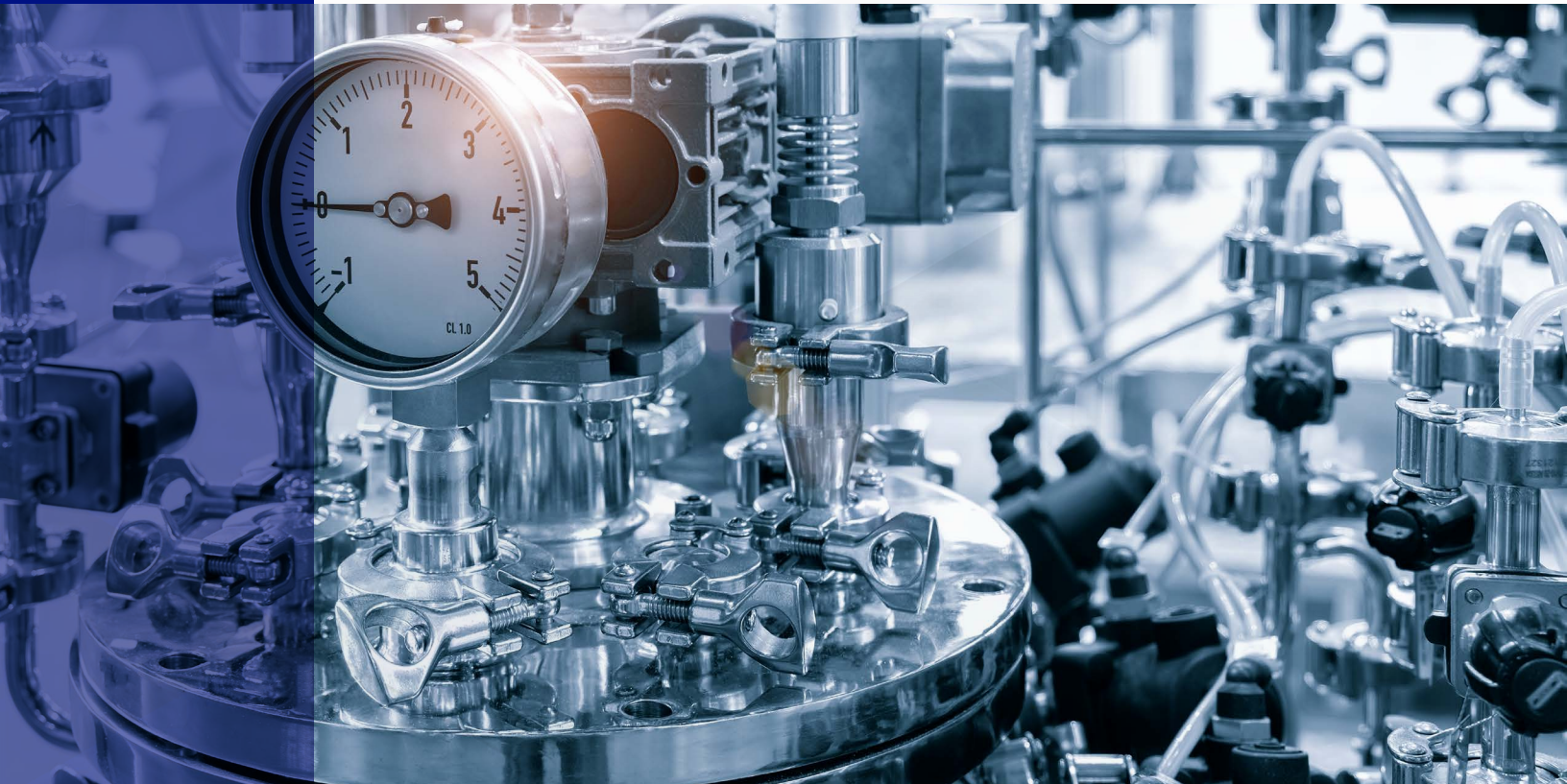
In 2023, the FDA cited calibration lapses at Lilly's Branchburg site, costing the company millions in lost biosimilar product and shaking investor confidence.

## Magellan Diagnostics

When calibration defects in their lead-testing devices went unaddressed, the result was a \$42 million settlement, a federal investigation, and irreparable brand damage.

These examples aren't anomalies; they're cautionary tales. Calibration non-compliance has a way of multiplying its impact. What starts as a missed task becomes a delayed shipment, a failed audit, a lost customer.

That's the hidden cost of letting calibration slip: it turns preventable issues into strategic vulnerabilities.



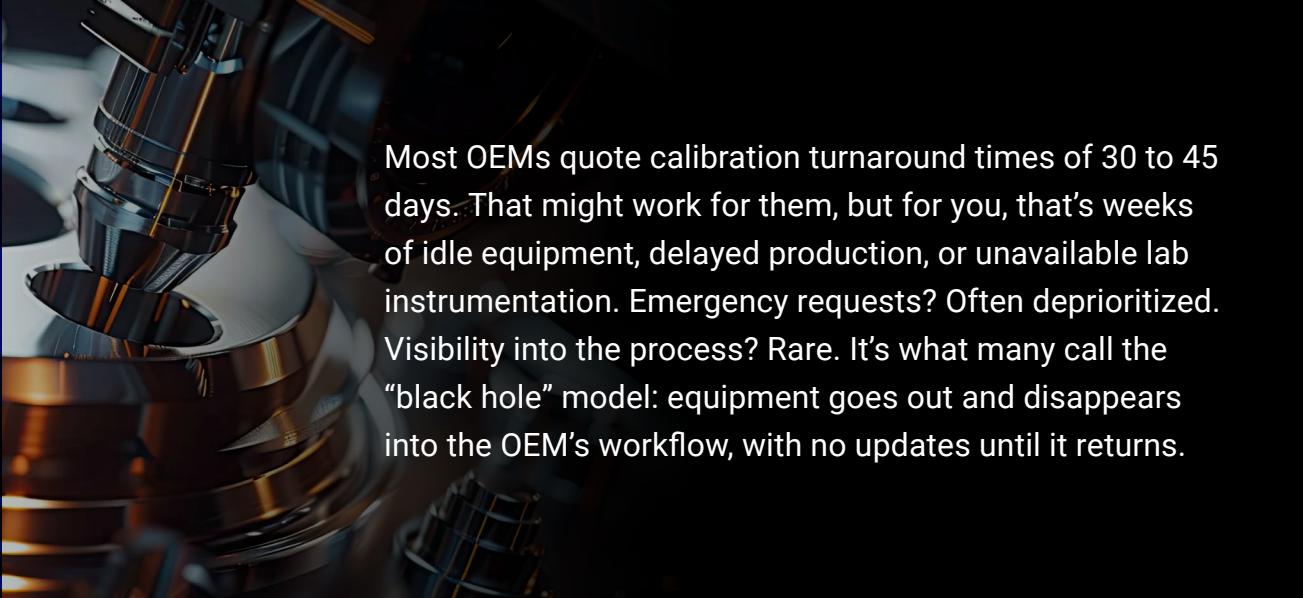
## The Hidden Costs of OEM-Controlled Calibration

On paper, sticking with your original equipment manufacturer (OEM) for calibration might seem like the safest choice. After all, who knows the equipment better than the people who built it?

But in practice, that “safe” decision often comes at a cost—one that only becomes clear when things slow down, communication breaks down, or you’re locked into a service contract that serves their priorities, not yours.

OEMs frequently use proprietary systems and restricted access to enforce exclusive service agreements. That means you can’t recalibrate on your own schedule—or choose a provider who’s faster, more transparent, or better aligned with your operational needs.

Instead, you wait.  
And wait.



Most OEMs quote calibration turnaround times of 30 to 45 days. That might work for them, but for you, that’s weeks of idle equipment, delayed production, or unavailable lab instrumentation. Emergency requests? Often deprioritized. Visibility into the process? Rare. It’s what many call the “black hole” model: equipment goes out and disappears into the OEM’s workflow, with no updates until it returns.

Meanwhile, the pressure on your team builds. Compliance deadlines loom. Production timelines slip. Stakeholders want answers.

What’s really at stake isn’t just speed; it’s control. When an OEM dictates your calibration schedule, they also dictate your compliance risk. And in a regulated environment, giving up that control can lead to consequences far more costly than the service fee.

## Avoiding Non-Compliance Through Third-Party Calibration

The best way to regain control over calibration? Stop depending on a single vendor's timeline, pricing, and priorities. Third-party calibration providers offer something OEMs often can't: flexibility without compromise.

A qualified third-party partner can service a wide range of equipment from multiple manufacturers—no proprietary restrictions, no “preferred vendor” bottlenecks. That means one provider, one process, and one system of record for everything calibrated across your operation. It's not just more efficient; it's safer, smarter, and more scalable.

### **This kind of multi-OEM capability gives you:**

1

#### **Faster turnaround times**

often just 5 to 10 days, not 30 to 45.

2

#### **Operational consistency**

even if you have dozens of brands or models across sites.

3

#### **Centralized compliance management**

with one platform for tracking, certifying, and reporting calibration activities.

It also solves the single biggest problem with OEM-only service models: the lack of visibility. With a third-party partner, you can track every job in progress, confirm calibration status in real time, and respond immediately to compliance concerns. That's a big shift—from reacting to problems to getting ahead of them.

And in regulated industries, being proactive isn't a luxury. It's a requirement.

## Proactive Compliance Through Automation

Manual calibration has its limits. It's time-consuming. It's inconsistent. And it puts a lot of pressure on technicians to get everything right, every time, under tight timelines. In regulated industries, that margin of error is just too risky.

That's why more organizations are turning to automation—not to replace human expertise, but to reinforce it with consistency, precision, and built-in compliance safeguards.

### **With the right tools in place, automation can:**

- Predict when recalibration will be needed based on usage trends, not just calendar dates.
- Trigger alerts when equipment starts to drift out of spec, catching issues before they become problems.
- Log calibration data in real time—accurately, consistently, and without relying on handwritten notes or spreadsheets.

This doesn't just save time. It creates airtight documentation. Certificates are generated automatically. Measurement uncertainty is built into the process. And audit trails are clean, complete, and defensible.

### **Putting Automation to Work**

A global medical device manufacturer integrated predictive calibration alerts across their lab network. Within weeks, they reduced emergency service calls, cut downtime, and improved compliance metrics across every site. The alerts gave them just enough lead time to recalibrate before any equipment slipped and auditors took notice.

Automation doesn't replace quality work. It amplifies it. And in a regulatory environment, it's one of the most powerful tools you can have to stay a step ahead.

## Building a Resilient Compliance Program

Compliance can't just be something you "pass." It has to be something you live—day in, day out, across every location, every shift, every asset. And that takes more than good intentions. It takes structure, visibility, and the right partners.

A resilient compliance program is built on repeatable systems and transparent data—not a scramble to prepare for audits when they're already on the calendar.

This kind of program doesn't just help you avoid risk. It helps you respond faster when things change, spot problems before they grow, and build a culture where compliance is expected, not feared.

And when calibration is treated as a strategic lever rather than a line item, it becomes a competitive advantage—not a compliance liability.

### What does that look like in practice?

1. Partnering with ISO 17025-accredited providers to ensure every calibration meets globally accepted standards.
2. Choosing vendors with multi-OEM capabilities, so you're not locked into one manufacturer's workflow.
3. Ensuring real-time access to calibration data, so you can quickly answer questions from regulators or internal teams.
4. Committing to consistent turnaround times, even when emergencies hit.
5. Tying calibration into your broader asset and quality management strategy, so it's not just a side process; it's integrated.



## The Future of Calibration Compliance in Lives-at-Stake Industries

The regulatory bar isn't getting lower. In fact, it's moving faster than ever.

Audits are more data-driven. Standards are evolving. And technology is raising expectations for what "compliant" should really look like. In lives-at-stake industries, staying current means more than just keeping up; it's also anticipating what's coming next.

That's why the most forward-thinking organizations are shifting from reactive compliance to predictive compliance. They're using analytics to forecast calibration needs. They're integrating real-time dashboards that show equipment status across multiple sites. They're designing quality systems that evolve alongside regulatory expectations rather than chasing them.

This isn't about doing more paperwork but doing smarter work.

### The future of calibration will be defined by:

1. **Transparency** – Systems that regulators can trust
2. **Automation** – Free up teams to focus on higher-risk areas
3. **Agility** – Respond to new standards without tearing apart your operations

Whether it's AI-assisted monitoring or centralized compliance platforms, the goal is the same: remove the guesswork, increase the certainty, and make compliance something you don't have to think twice about.



## Moving Forward with Confidence

In regulated industries, calibration is a trust mechanism. It's the link between a controlled process and a safe outcome—and when that link breaks, everything else is at risk.

But here's the good news: compliance doesn't have to be a scramble nor a patchwork of spreadsheets, surprise audits, and last-minute fixes. With the right systems, the right partners, and the right mindset, calibration can become one of the most reliable, proactive parts of your operation.

That's how you **reduce downtime**.

That's how you **protect your brand**.

And that's how you **keep people safe** every day.

Because when calibration is treated like a priority, it stops being a vulnerability and starts being your advantage.

**Ready to strengthen your calibration strategy?** If you're looking to reduce compliance risk, improve turnaround times, or gain visibility across your calibration program, let's talk. Reach out today and find out how we can help you move forward with confidence.



SIMCO is the leading provider of calibration and software services for technology organizations, bringing over 60 years of calibration industry leadership. Our experience enables us to develop exceptional solutions for service management.

Founded in 1962 to service NASA and high technology firms in Silicon Valley, SIMCO is committed to delivering life-saving quality leaner, by providing the highest level of quality and customer service.

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