

STANDARD DEVIATIONS: Time's Up!

Greetings,



Think you've got fast hands? A quick wit? How many plates can you sub in an hour? How many diffs can you crank out in one sitting? Can you keep up with the number of samples coming into the lab? How fast is too fast?

Seems like it's all about speed and turn-around-times, anymore. And, yeah, we're fast. Machines are fast, computers are fast, everything we do seems to hinge on how quickly we push that result out. Does that make us any better at what we do, or just more stressed?

When do we draw a line between volume and value? And does working at break-neck speed result in a broken neck?

From a safety perspective, right is always better than right-away.

An interesting story came out of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, last week. It came from Gainesville, Georgia, the "Poultry Capital of the World." Here, chicken fingers aren't the only fingers coming off the line. The USDA is waiving regulation oversight of line speed in favor of faster and faster thru-put. Chicken parts and human parts are flying off the lines, now.

The National Chicken Council's request for waivers acknowledged that "worker safety is a factor plants must consider when deciding the most appropriate line speed for their operations." But



the trade group argued that this shouldn't prevent the USDA from issuing waivers because companies could take actions to address the risks.

11 plants that received permission to run faster did so despite having a history of serious accidents, including deaths.

When the USDA started issuing line speed waivers to poultry plants last year, the agency said it **wouldn't consider the impact on worker safety**. "The agency has neither the authority nor the expertise to regulate issues related to establishment worker safety," the USDA said in its official announcement of the speed waivers. "OSHA is the federal agency with statutory and regulatory authority to promote workplace safety and health."

But OSHA has no control over line speeds. A spokeswoman with the agency said the USDA "has sole jurisdiction over line speeds at these plants." But they also state, "Increasing line speeds will increase poultry workers' exposure to all of these hazards," (David Michaels, the head of OSHA from 2009 to 2017).

I don't know about you, but I've never waited at the meat counter for chicken, parts or whole. It's all about the money.

I'm not comparing laboratory sample turn-around to processing poultry. I'm saying that putting speed and profit over worker safety is not good for workers, in any situation.

In the lab, we know that our speed is integral to good patient care. But the integrity of our work is dependent on precision, accuracy, and certainty. These are attributes of good lab science that can't be rushed. And emphasizing speed and quantity over confidence and quality jeopardizes our work and our safety. As soon as a short-cut makes something faster, it also introduces error. And errors are what lead to accidents.

We need to be sure that our effort results in the best patient care. That will always mean doing it right, not right away. Look, I know you're busy. But just like the sorcerer's apprentice, working faster won't make the work go away. It just seems to come that much faster (yeah, tell me I'm wrong). Work safely and smartly at the pace that is best for your patients, not the nurse or doc on the phone bugging you for results.

Have a great week and be safe,

Bryan

p.s. My biosafety message this week: **Wear eye-protection. It may save you from being blind-sided!**

