

PROTECTING AMERICAN LIVES

Keeping Food Safe

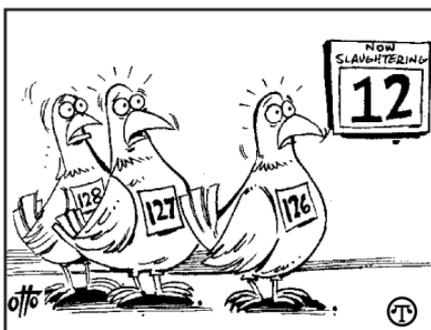
(NAPSA)—Here's some food for thought: concerned consumers and production line workers are getting together to reduce the risk of contaminated meat.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, food-borne pathogens such as E. coli, Salmonella, and Campylobacter are responsible for over 76 million illnesses each year in the United States. Of these, 325,000 result in hospitalizations and 5,000 end in death. According to the USDA, the primary source of harmful bacteria found in poultry and beef is fecal contamination.

This kind of contamination can come from excessively high slaughterhouse line speeds, which have doubled in the last 20 years. As fast-moving workers and faster-moving machines carve up chickens and cows, bacteria from burst intestines mix with fresh meat to create contamination.

Government studies found 99 percent of the poultry and 79 percent of the ground beef tested contained evidence of contamination.

Explained Megan Parke, Director of Eat Rights, a project of Home Justice Watch, "that speed comes at a very high cost—to consumers in the form of fecal contamination and dangerous bacteria on our meat, and to slaughterhouse workers, who are literally maimed, crippled, and sometimes even killed on the job." A comprehensive study conducted by the Eat Rights Project found that more than half of the workers in the slaughterhouses are injured on the job—making this one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States.



Excessive speed on the production line can lead to contaminated food in your fridge. Fortunately, you can protect yourself.

The nonprofit consumer watch group believes the institutions that sell and serve food are in the best position to force changes in the biggest and most visible slaughterhouse companies. The power of wholesale and retail customers can be applied to remedy violations in slaughterhouses.

Perhaps the best protection for consumers and workers is to slow down the excessively high line speeds in slaughterhouses. In addition to speaking out on the issue, you can protect yourself and your family by taking three steps toward safer food:

Chill: When you get meat home, freeze or refrigerate it immediately.

Clean: Wash your hands and all utensils before and after touching raw food and between different foods.

Cook: Cook to an internal temperature of at least 145° F for steaks, 160° F for hamburger and 180° F for poultry.

You can learn more about food contamination and what you can do about it online at: www.eatrights.org.