

Case Study 6: Testing a product

[Case study developed by John McBain & James Balassone]

Some agencies authorize companies to test products, provide the data to the agency, and ship the product bearing the agency mark. The company's capability has been evaluated by the agency and a contract signed to allow this. A new high-end computer is ready to ship - except for one test that you will not complete for another three weeks. The probability of failure is low - and even if the test fails, corrections can be made and sent out later to customers. Marketing is VERY anxious to ship because the end of the fiscal quarter is next week.

Your boss tells you that this has occurred before; the company shipped the product, and there was no problem. He also says that if you do not want to sign off, then he will do so.

Ask:

What ethical principles matter here? Could you be violating a professional code of conduct? If there is a compromise (ethical principle/code) at play here can it be justified?

Questions:

1. Should you put on the agency mark and ship while finishing the test?
2. Should you let your boss sign off for you instead?
3. Should you try to offer an alternative solution of some sort?

4. Does the kind of product being tested impact your decision, i.e. if the product was a medical device (like a stent) would that change your decision?