



## Where is my sample?

TL;DR: We probably have it. We're at about a 2-week turnaround, after it arrives here at the lab.

One of the nice things about working for Blackstone is that most people love us. We get calls, emails, and (mostly) 5-star google reviews because we really help people with their engines. When we go to Oshkosh (the world's largest airshow) people literally come up to the booth and say to someone standing there, "Man, I LOVE these guys. You should use them!" Not even exaggerating. That happens every year.

But lately there's been a little...how should I put it? A little disturbance in the Blackstone galaxy. A little malaise. Some ruffled feathers, if you will. And it centers around one question: Where is my sample?

Our phone people answer this question approximately 5 million times a day. It's all people want to know. (Well, maybe not all: some people want to know why phosphorus is high. Pro tip: it's an additive!)

Seriously though, probably 75% of the phone calls we get are people who want to know 1) Do we have their sample (usually yes), and 2) When is it going to be done? The answer to the second one, as of this writing, is probably a couple weeks from when it arrived here.

### Instant Gratification

When my dad first started Blackstone, he came up with the slogan "The Right Answer, Right Away." Turnaround time was a big selling point for him – he did his level best (and usually succeeded) in beating the competition on getting samples done ASAP. Which is helpful if you're buying a boat or an airplane, or if your engine's making a funny noise.

The world has changed since dad hung out his shingle in 1985. The internet has become our biggest selling point: every engine out there, every car, every plane, boat, motorcycle (and more) has a forum dedicated to that specific oil-using machine. That's how most people hear about us. They buy a new car (truck, plane, motorcycle, boat) and go online to research and up pops Blackstone. The kits are free! And samples are affordable! What's not to love? Everyone wants in.

But over the last decade or so, as Amazon Prime changed the landscape with 2-day delivery, people got used to getting their stuff now. *Right. Now.* And if it takes a while: what the heck? Where is it?

That, my friends, is where we find ourselves today. Blackstone's oil analysis is awesome, helpful, and affordable, and everyone and their grandmother is sending us samples. People are impatient for their results. We get it! It's annoying to wait!

The post office has really cleaned up their act [since I last wrote about them](#) and now gets us samples in about 4 days. Unfortunately, we are under an absolute mountain of samples right now (see figures 1 and 2), and we're having a liiiiiittle trouble keeping up. Maybe you've noticed?

## **So What are We Doing About it?**

Well, in addition to our very kind phone people (seriously, they're saints) taking your calls and trying to help determine when your sample will be done, we've got quite a few irons in the fire.

"Why don't you hire more people?" asked one irate guy I was talking with the other week. My friends, we have done and are continuing to do just that. But that's not as straightforward as it seems. New people need a place to sit. They need a network connection. They need a phone hookup. Desks, supplies, training. The training! We can get new receptionists/mail room/lab techs up to speed pretty quickly. New analysts, on the other hand, train for a solid month before they can even start writing reports. And it's a year before they've learned enough to analyze the wide range of samples we get. Still: in the last 12 months we've added 4 analysts, we have 4 more starting this month, and we plan to hire even more in the spring. To house all these people, we're renovating a(nother) building just for analysts.

Of course, that's just the hiring and training. We can unpack samples till the cows come home, but those samples have to go somewhere. We are a do-it-yourself operation – we code our own in-house software and remodel our own spaces. When we run out of trays to put samples in, we build more. As I write these words, we are building our third new batch of several hundred trays in six months.

We currently have two labs, and both are at capacity. So we are also in the process of building a third. Of course, the lab needs equipment. Thankfully we do not build our own spectrometers, but our trusty supplier has stopped making the spectrometers we've used for decades. So we had to find a new supplier, and now we've got another spectrometer coming. Once it arrives we have to incorporate it into our existing system. That requires coding on top of the physical aspects of adding a machine/new lab/more people into the workflow.

And we're working Saturdays! We really are trying to catch up.

## **First-World Problems**

What a good problem to have, right? So much work that we can barely keep up! This was dad's dream, all those years ago.

A note for those of you who really can't wait – if you overnight your sample to us, we'll turn it around within a day or two. Otherwise, know that we're making steady improvements to improve efficiency, expand our capacity, and still maintain high quality standards and deliver reports that zing.

I guess I can stop worrying about electric cars. As long as there is oil in the world, people are going to need oil analysis. We are working our tails off to keep up, expand Blackstone, and get back to a fast turnaround time. Feel free to call us to see where your sample is, and please, be nice to our phone people. "The Right Answer, *Right Away*" is coming (back) soon!