

Is Pest Control for the Birds?

Birds can become a serious health problem if they're not properly managed. In food plants they can contaminate products, making control even more of a necessity. But to protect people and products from our feathered friends, plant managers first have to understand them.

The three so-called "pest birds" – pigeons, sparrows and starlings – are very common in and around commercial facilities because many such places offer food, water and safe rooftops on which to perch. This isn't good news for food plants.

The acid in bird droppings is highly corrosive and can damage building exteriors and machinery, while their molted feathers, dried droppings and ectoparasites can cause severe respiratory infections and pose a food safety hazard. That's why all third-party food safety auditors deduct for nests and other signs of bird presence. The American Institute of Baking (AIB) even requires physical bird control measures like spikes or netting.

To battle birds effectively, plant managers have to understand what the birds are doing on the property. Ideally the birds are just loafing, which makes them relatively easy to repel or relocate. Feeding birds won't leave until food and water sources are identified and removed. Roosting or nesting birds are the most difficult to control because they have chosen to call the property home and will resist relocation stubbornly.

Since successful bird control relies on analysis before action, Frank Meek, B.C.E., Technical Services Director for Orkin, Inc., recommends a three-step process to manage unwanted birds:

- **Inspect** – During the initial visit, an Orkin bird control specialist will conduct a detailed site survey to identify the problem bird species, its feeding and watering locations, and any roosting, nesting and loafing areas.
- **Modify habitat** – Next, it's time to make rooftops and other areas of bird activity less accessible and more uncomfortable to birds. Techniques may include netting, bird coils, bird spikes or bird wire. At one customer facility in California, Meek said Orkin uses a low-voltage, solar-powered shock system along I-beams and a crane where the facility's bird problem originates.
- **Select and integrate other controls** – When habitat modifications fail to control a bird problem, a plant must evaluate and implement other treatment options appropriate to the situation. These may include trapping, relocation, or even the use of light and sound to deter roosting and nesting.

Ongoing monitoring and maintenance is imperative to successful bird management, notes Meek, so it's helpful to have a professional regularly inspect and adjust the bird control program as needed, checking equipment installations and providing recommendations and written service reports.

By stopping bird problems in their tracks, food plants can improve food safety and third-party audit scores.