

Warehouse facilities' directors battle the birds

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Open warehouse doors issue an open invitation to birds. Inside, the high rafters offer warm shelter and a natural nesting niche for birds of all feathers.

Wendell Murphy, vice president of an Avis rental car franchise and an air-freight trucking business in Lexington, Ky., knows the habits of birds all too well.

"For a dozen years, we tried to keep the birds out of our 4,000-square-foot warehouse at the airport," Murphy says.

Numerous varieties of small birds invaded, attracted by the 15-foot ceiling and by the potential of uninterrupted roosting space.

"Last spring," Murphy reports, "the problem got worse as insulation in the ceiling was deteriorating."

Driven in by spring rains, the birds nested wherever the insulation pulled loose, creating convenient pockets for nests – "up and behind the insulation, where it was warm and dry," Murphy describes.

Look Out Below

Murphy minces no words about the nuisance created by the incoming birds.

"Droppings hit the freight and the floor and got on packages and equipment," he says. With birds nesting in the rafters and in the sagging ceiling insulation, "it was a mess," he says.

The warehouse/dock was a major hub of activity, with trucks loading and unloading on one side and airplanes on the other side. The doors were open all summer for receiving and dispatching. A cure for the scourge of small birds was badly needed.

If at First You Don't Succeed ...

Murphy and his crew tried many remedies.

"We washed the building with high-pressure cleaners. It did not get rid of the birds," he says.

They tried rubber snakes and artificial owls in the rafters.

"It didn't phase them," Murphy says.

One employee tried rifle shot.

"That didn't suit me," Murphy is quick to point out. "I like birds, and rifles would put holes in the ceiling."

Murphy took his next lesson in bird deterrence from the Lexington Airport.

"The passenger terminal has a big overhang," he says. "The airport facilities' manager, who is also an engineer, told me they used an ultrasonic device successfully to avoid problems at the passenger check-in area."

The facilities' manager recommended a product manufactured by Bird-X Inc., a Chicago-based company. The unit uses a high-pitched, variable sound above the threshold of normal human hearing but which is annoying to birds.

Preparation and Installation

Murphy ordered a QuadBlaster QB-4 unit from Bird-X.

"We read the instructions and followed them to the letter," he says.

Because of the excessive deterioration, Murphy's crew erected scaffolding to get the birds out, cleaned up the mess and secured the insulation with wood strips. They then washed the whole building with high-pressure hoses.

"It's very important to prepare the site properly before installing the unit," he says. "We placed the QB-4 unit about 10 feet above the floor and away from the dispatchers' office."

The unit is small – about 8 inches square and 2 inches thick, he says – and easy to install.

"It worked wonders for us," he says. "We had no more trouble. Birds fly in, land on the rafters, and fly right out. The unit bothers the birds by emitting a high-pitched tone that birds don't like. It surely eliminated our problem."

Benefits Flock In

Now the warehouse is clean. "No more mess," Murphy states. "And our employees feel better now because the dock is clean. It perked up morale because employees understand that management does care."

Murphy cites the health factors that were of concern. If bird droppings are allowed to accumulate, he suggests, they can release unhealthy gases. "We corrected the problem, and employees appreciate it," he says.

Murphy also notes the savings in clean-up costs.

"Anybody in the warehouse business probably has a problem with birds," says Murphy, who has been in the business for 42 years. "We spent less than \$600 to get the job done. I would have been willing to spend ten times that.

"I've looked for years for something like this. I'm happy that someone told me about it. Without this ultrasonic solution, our bird problem would have multiplied ten-fold."

Murphy is also happy that the unit does no harm to birds.

"I enjoy birds," says Murphy, who has been blind since 1965. "I like listening to them, and I have bird feeders and bird baths around my home."

A Second Opinion

Ray Salvesen is warehouse supervisor for Comdisco Inc., a technology services company that uses a warehouse near Chicago to recondition and store high-tech equipment. Salvesen explains Comdisco's special problem with birds.

"We were looking into installing motion detectors as a security measure, and we didn't want birds setting off the alarm system," he says.

And there was another problem: "Prospective customers tour the facilities," Salvesen says. A scene of dead birds and excrement dripping on equipment would not be a pretty sight.

Many varieties of birds – sparrows, blackbirds, robins and starlings – were coming in the dock doors and nesting in the warehouse's three enclosed docks. To deter the birds, Salvesen first considered mounting flashy tape and balloons, but he didn't think that would be sufficiently effective since the birds had already nested.

Doing It Right

Then he heard about Bird-X's ultrasonic unit.

"We bought one and installed it about 35 feet up in the beams of one of the docks," he says, after he and his staff removed existing nests and applied steel wool and mesh screening to deter repeat visitors. "We noticed that birds came in, perched in one spot a minute or two, tried another spot, and then flew out. Soon they stopped coming in at all."

"I was leery at first," Salvesen says. The QB-4 was installed during

the month of May. "Winter would be the true test," he says. The test of the QB-4 during wintertime was indeed successful. "They didn't come in at all," he states.

Since the QB-4 worked so well in one dock, Salvesen installed another unit in the second dock.

"We didn't need one for the third dock," he says; the two ultrasonic units covered the territory adequately.

Conclusion

Warehouses and birds don't mix well. Birds create an unsightly and unhealthy environment for employees, customers and visitors. Bird droppings, besides creating costly clean-up problems every day, can damage stored products and warehouse equipment. Many facilities' directors have found that one reliable and unobtrusive way to control or eliminate the nuisance is to install ultrasonic devices. The high-frequency sounds effectively "bother the birds away" without harming them, keeping the warehouse building and dock areas shipshape and safer.