

Birds steer clear of DJ

Is that a bird? Or is it Memorex?

If it's any number of squawks, caws and other birdly noises you hear at Dave Johnston Plant, it's most likely a recording. Few — if any — birds dare fly near the plant these days.

That's because the plant is using four BroadBand PRO bird harassment units to take the environmentally friendly approach to discourage starlings from visiting and littering the plant.

The system offers a wide selection of general bird danger sounds — recorded distress cries by smaller birds and predatory sounds from larger ones — and ultrasonic waves. To further encourage birds into giving the plant a wide berth, it's programmable to generate random timing, volume and frequency.

"The starlings blackened the sky when they came in flocks of a thousand or more," said Richard Bates, operations supervisor. "They'd roost on our electrostatic precipitator and on all four generators."

Dave Sheetz, certified welder mechanic, tried several methods to discourage them but the best ones succeeded only temporarily.

"Their droppings covered the units," Dave explained. As if that wasn't enough, the birds ate Russian olives from nearby trees. "So there'd be hundreds of coated olive pits all over the place as well."

He was concerned about the human health risks posed by the bird droppings. So was Richard. "Fungus grows in moist conditions, and airborne particles can cause infection," Richard explained. They both also worried about the hazards of the bird droppings on the hardware.

"The acid content in the droppings could eventually eat through the paint and let rust develop," Dave said. Structural integrity would be difficult to maintain if the birds stayed.

Hurting the birds was not an option. "We take our environmental stewardship seriously," Richard said.

Internet and magazine research turned up a manufacturer that specializes in systems to deter birds without causing them harm.

Dave installed the sound systems atop units 1 and 2, three-quarters up unit 4 and under the floor of the elevated electrostatic precipitator.

Where did the birds go? "They're roosting in trees near the river now, out of harm's way," Dave said.



"Bye bye birdie" was the result of the system Richard Bates (left) and Dave Sheetz installed at Dave Johnston to protect employees and the plant from unwanted visitors.

