

Blasting off a pesky problem: A humane solution to shoo away birds

Solving problems in the aerospace industry does not always involve high-tech computers and elaborate engineering data, as facilities managers at the Thiokol Corp. — which builds booster rockets for NASA's space shuttles and missiles for the U.S. Air Force — can testify.

For years, hordes of barn swallows nested and raised their young amid the eaves and columns of building A-2 in the Brigham City, UT, complex, which includes 410 buildings. The thousands of swallows created unsightly and odorous messes that annoyed employees and required windows to be washed every two weeks, so an assault was launched against the creatures.

Dallas Jones, manager of Construction in the Space Division, initially tried to frighten the birds away by installing 20 owl replicas. "They were wary for a few hours only. The swallows built their nests right on the owls," he says. Plan B: "We tried a rotating strobe light beacon. We hung it at the same level of the nests, where it was supposed to annoy the birds." The swallows persevered, but so did Jones. The third eradication effort involved members of the local fire department, whose high-pressure water hoses blasted off the birds' nests before eggs were laid. That plan inadvertently drenched computers inside the building, due to the high water pressure, and the birds were back to rebuild their nests the next morning.

In a move that offered temporary relief, Jones and Kenny Allred, chief carpenter in the Space Division, smeared petroleum jelly on the entire nesting area. The birds couldn't get their footing or make their nests stick, Allred says. But the jelly melted in hot weather and ran down the wall. When it came time to repaint the building, the jelly had to be removed with a solvent.

Then a Thiokol maintenance worker read about a bird-detering gel, Bird-Proof, made by Bird-X, Inc., Chicago. The transparent gel repels birds from their normal roosting areas. When applied on ledges, beams, rafters, or other favorite landing sites, the compound discourages birds for more than a year. The substance leaves a tacky feeling that birds dislike, yet is odorless, harmless, and environmentally safe, the manufacturer says. After seeing success with a 30-foot test strip, the maintenance crew applied the compound all around the building. "We're in our third year now, and no reapplication has been necessary," Jones says. Bird-Proof solved a similar problem with starlings at the Thiokol compound's A-1 building, and maintenance officials in the company's Strategic Division also use the product.

One piece of advice is offered by Jones: "Take action before the birds build their nests or after the young are raised and gone." **Bird-Proof by Bird-X, Inc. Circle 303 on the Reader Service Card, page 73. ■**