



PRODUCTS IN ACTION

Bird squadrons bomb no more

Bird-spike product keeps birds from landing on electrical fixtures at airports

By R.W. Delaney

There's no delicate way to put this: Bird excrement on runway lights is hideous and hazardous. From a pilot safety standpoint alone, the filthy white film covering the face of lights and directional signs along the taxiways and the runway of San Bernardino International Airport was unacceptable.

R.W. Delaney, a free-lance writer, wrote this article for Bird-X.

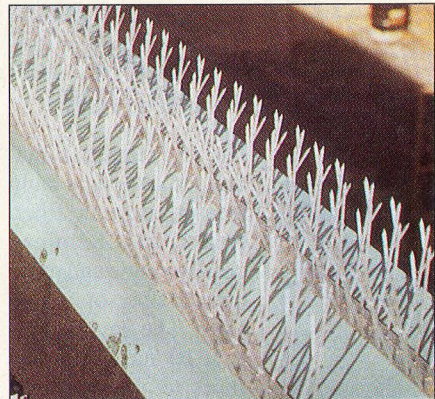
"The bird poop was obstructing and obscuring the lights, creating a safety hazard," said Eric Ray, airport operations officer at the 1000-acre California airport. The San Bernardino International Airport inherited the problem in 1994, when it took over the facility, a former military base. A mixed bag of birds, including hawks and smaller species, sat on top of the globe-like lights with their tails hanging over the front of the lights, and did what

comes naturally.

Ray's team expended about 200 man-hours per year to clean up the bird mess. And the airport maintenance crew had to clean not only the runway and taxiway lights, but also the airport's directional signs that guide pilots along proper routes before take-off and after landing. The big black and yellow directional signs were streaked and defaced by the bird droppings.

Why were the offending birds so fond of sitting on the airport lights and signs? Ray thinks he understands why. Airports are usually flat. San Bernardino's airport definitely is, and it covers a sprawling 1000 acres. For birds to gain any competitive advantage, they need to be elevated so they can spot their prey or enemies.

"Lights and signs are the obvious perches above this flat land," Ray said. Even an elevation as small as the height of a runway light is better than nothing for birds to see what's what on the vast terrain. It was not going to be easy to dissuade the unwel-



Strategically placed plastic spikes keep birds from landing.

come "roosters" to give up their favorite lookouts.

The situation became intolerable. Handling an average of 25,000 operations annually, the San Bernardino Airport Authority wanted a reliable solution. The maintenance team had a bright idea. They glued ordinary nails to the globe lights. "It was only marginally effective," Ray said. "The nails wouldn't adhere properly to the surface." And the nails didn't cover enough area across the top of the globe to prevent smaller birds from crowding their way back onto their favorite perches, he adds. Birds can be very persistent.

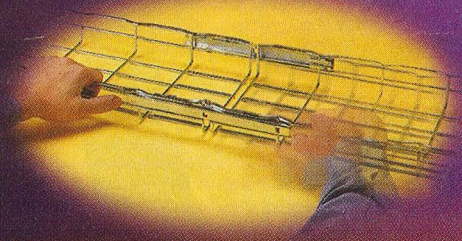
Ray refused to try the Hot Sauce solution. He had heard that others had used a Tabasco-like concoction to discourage birds. "They said it worked for awhile, but then the rain washed it away and left a red mess."

Ray wanted a permanent, colorless, odorless fix. One day he saw just what he wanted in a trade magazine advertisement featuring Needle Strips, a product manufactured by Bird-X, Inc. of Chicago.

"The minute I saw the ad, I thought, 'Someone finally marketed exactly what

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we need." Spikes have wide, angled branches like a Christmas tree to deter birds," he said. Made of transparent plastic, the spikes are almost invisible and maintenance-free. They can't rust. The density of the configuration of the plastic spikes creates an impenetrable barrier against birds. Best of all, they do the job.

Ray said they worked as soon as his maintenance crew could install the Spikes directly on the airport lights and signs. "Birds can't land where the Spikes are, and it's hard for birds to lean up against the Spikes and squeeze their way onto the lights," Ray said. "It has greatly reduced the problem." And, he adds, Spikes do not affect the functional operation of the lights at all. They do not interfere with the electrical wiring or connections in any way, nor with the normal electrical maintenance procedures for the lights.

Spikes are easy to install. They come in 12-inch strips that can be glued, nailed or screwed onto the surface as needed. While the Spikes product is most commonly used on buildings for keeping birds off roofs, ledges, architectural details and beams, Ray found them ideal for application atop the runway and taxiway lights.

The spikes are environmentally safe and do not harm birds. Ray said on the airport's largest directional signs, which can be as wide as 10 feet, the maintenance crew added screws to supplement the glue for extra insurance in case of high winds.

All of San Bernardino International Airport's 700 taxiway and runway light fixtures and 54 guidance signs are outfitted with Spikes strips, and Ray has ready advice for others with bird problems at airports or on electrical fixtures.

"Before resorting to big-time noise canisters or ultra-sonic devices, try Spikes." For airport operations officer Eric Ray, the Spikes product is a simpler and less expensive solution that has saved San Bernardino Airport Authority 200 man-hours a year in cleanup costs.

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