Controlling Birds during the Summer Months

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Bird populations are on the rise, and an interior bird issue can be more commonplace in the summer months. Birds become a greater threat to food facilities as birds carry diseases such as salmonella, and an interior bird problem can increase the potential for contamination if the bird reaches a sensitive area in the food plant.

As temperatures increase, there may be a greater temptation by employees to leave doors open for increased ventilation. The time to initiate a bird management plan is not when the house sparrow flies through the door, as it will be too late. Performing exterior bird management is a critical component of preventing indoor occurrences. This includes educating your employees regarding the importance of keeping doors closed and correction of structural deficiencies will be required to keep birds out.

Tips for Prevention

To start an interior bird prevention program, there are several steps plan mangers can take:

- **Inspect the exterior of the facility at least monthly.** Look for evidence of pest birds such as droppings, feathers or nesting materials. Focus inspection efforts on finding those conditions which can provide food, water and shelter. Also inspect for access points such as openings around dock

doors and levelers. The inspection must cover all areas of the plant exterior including ground level and roof. Use the information uncovered in the inspection to further educate staff and correct conducive conditions.

- **Establish a regular clean-up schedule.** Food is one of the major attractions for birds. Food spillage around dumpsters, silos and rail unloading areas are some examples of where birds may find food. Establishing a regularly scheduled clean-up is essential. Roofs and product accumulations in these areas should also be checked. Roof areas can be difficult to clean, especially if there is a gravel layer on top of a membrane roof. But product can be present in these areas through equipment malfunctions. Inspect both high and low for food sources and eliminate them.
- **Eliminate accessible water sources.** Water will also attract birds and provide an essential need. Birds need a readily available source of drinking water. Parking lot pot holes, poorly designed drainage systems and other sources of standing water can provide the drinking water. Eliminate these sources whenever feasible.
- **Evaluate structures and landscaping.** The last conducive condition focus is harborage. Pest birds, like the English house sparrow, will readily build their nest in structures like gaps in exterior walls. Pigeons will seek harborage on ledges especially when there is some cover provided over the ledge. Inspect these nesting opportunities and seal or use bird management devices to repel or exclude birds. Bird netting is often used to exclude nesting areas like those found underneath overhangs and canopies.

Landscaping should also be evaluated for its impact in providing nesting or resting opportunities. Although some municipalities may place certain requirements regarding landscape choices, trees with dense foliage and cover should be avoided. Consider pruning trees and shrubs to reduce attractiveness. Removal of the problematic vegetation may be the best solution where possible.

Inspecting the building for openings which are vulnerable to bird entry is another important survey function. This includes, doors, windows and vents which do not seal properly or are intentionally left open.

Actions to Take if Faced with an Interior Bird Problem

Despite your best efforts at prevention, what should you do if a bird gets in?

- **Minimize food safety risks.** This means isolate the bird from any exposed food or food contact surfaces. An example would be to keep all doors to packaging and production closed. Birds can carry a variety of pathogens including Salmonella. Keeping these highly mobile pests away from production and exposed food is critical.
- **Use light management to try to encourage the bird to leave.** Turn off the interior lights and open the doors. In addition, laser guns or noise can be used to help move the bird towards the open doors. These procedures should be done as soon as the bird enters. It is important not to let the bird

become acclimated to its surroundings. If it becomes comfortable, lights and harassment strategies will be less successful.

- **If attempts to get the bird to leave on its own are unsuccessful, trapping or shooting may be required.** Mist nets are the most common method used to trap and remove a bird. Nets can be installed on a permanent basis or rotated to areas based on the bird's flight pattern. Either way, it will take time to observe bird movement and flight patterns. Use nets where birds are routinely flying and where subdued lighting may help hide the net. Birds will avoid nets if they can easily see them. Most nets are black in color but different color nets are available. Use a net which will be least visible in the surroundings in which it is placed. In some cases, multiple nets may be required to cover normal flight paths and potential escape routes. Mist nets will require time and skill to be effective. Nets must be constantly monitored to ensure captured birds are removed promptly.

Before selecting a trapping or shooting method, consult state and local regulations regarding any applicable firearm ordinances or trapping restrictions. There will be some safety concerns which must be addressed when shooting birds with a pellet riffle. In addition some plants may have their own restrictions regarding the use of firearms on site. Most species of birds are federally protected. Identify the bird and make sure that whatever control method is selected will meet all legal requirements.

All animals need food, water and shelter. Establishing a program to inspect and eliminate these elements for survival will help reduce both interior and exterior populations during the summer months and avoid a potential food safety issue.

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[1] http://www.mccloudservices.com/