

Bird Proof Gel: Road Crew Safety

R. W. Delaney, Business Writer

It wasn't annual migration. It was permanent "squatters' rights" for pigeons in the City of Clearwater, Florida. Glenn Weaver, supervisor of maintenance for the city's 140 traffic signals, decided he had to do something about the infestation of pigeons under the overpass at the intersection of U.S. 19 and State Road 60. The pesky pigeons were roosting atop ledges along the wall directly above traffic control signal equipment and other electronic equipment boxes. The droppings were creating a mess for Weaver and for Clearwater, a city of more than 100,000 people.

Of Health, Welfare and Water

The overrun of unwanted birds had to be stopped. "The droppings were causing concern about the health hazard," Weaver says. He didn't want his crews working in an unhealthy environment, as they were forced to do periodically while checking and maintaining traffic equipment.

The health hazard that Weaver sensed was not imaginary. Besides being unsightly, bird droppings often harbor fungi that can trigger serious—even fatal—lung diseases (namely, Histoplasmosis and Cryptococcus) when the spores are transmitted to humans who may breathe in the harmful fecal dust.

The buildup of bird droppings under the Clearwater overpass covered the concrete walkway almost completely. "It was a dirty environment," Weaver says. "The droppings could contain mites. I didn't want to send people into that mess to service the equipment."

To get rid of the droppings, Weaver's crew used a water truck and hose to blast the mess. "We blew off the buildup with a jet stream of high-pressure water," he details. This got rid of the mess, but not the birds. "Two months later, we'd have to do it all over again," he admits.

Driving the Birds Out of Town

The problem with pigeons was old and entrenched. Weaver has worked in city traffic maintenance for over ten years, the past three of which have been in his position as Clearwater's Chief Traffic Signal Technician. "We had the problem ever since I'd been with the city," he says. "We tried a number of remedies."

First, Weaver and his crew strung a network of cords, creating a web intended to keep the pigeons off the ledges. No such luck. "There was no positive effect," he reports. "The birds could fly between the strings."

Next, Weaver tried plastic owls—to no avail. "The pigeons would sit right next to them," he says. He ventures a guess that city birds had never seen an owl, explaining why the owls were totally ineffective in scaring away the pigeons.

Then Weaver and his crew attempted to use blaring sound as a deterrent to roosting. They placed on the ledge a loud siren, similar to a smoke-alarm horn, which was controlled by a time clock. "We programmed the siren to go on at 15-minute intervals for 10-second bursts," he says. "The wailing sound was effective only temporarily. The birds got used to it in a couple of weeks and came back to roost again, right next to the siren." He theorizes that the pigeons were so accustomed to the traffic noises of the two highways that the siren was just one more noise component. Furthermore, he says, "the birds quickly realized the sound wouldn't hurt them."

The pigeons weren't about to give up their cozy, convenient roosting spot under the overpass, sheltered from the weather. But Weaver wasn't giving up either. "We contacted the Florida Department of Transportation." They understood the problem, but didn't offer a solution, he says.

They Went That-Away

About that time, Weaver saw an ad for a product called Bird Proof Gel. Bird Proof Gel is a highly effective bird-deterrent gel made by Bird-X, Inc. in Chicago. It is a transparent gel that repels bird pests from their normal roosting areas. When applied on ledges, beams, rafters, cornices, ornamental copings and similar favorite "landing sites," the gel compound discourages birds from alighting and nesting—usually for a year or more, even under most extreme weather conditions.



Bird Proof Gel has a tacky feeling that birds shun; yet it's harmless, odorless, nonpoisonous and environmentally safe. It's easy to apply with any standard caulking gun. Bird Proof Gel is also available in liquid form for easy spraying on trees and over other large surfaces or less accessible areas.

Here at last was something Weaver hadn't tried before. He ordered a case of Bird Proof Gel. "We put it along the ledges on both sides of the overpass and on the street light lamps—anywhere that birds roost," he explains. "It was easy to apply using a caulking gun, a two-man crew, and a bucket truck to reach the ledges." He was determined to discourage the dirty birds.

Bird Proof Gel Unseats Pigeons

The effect of Bird Proof Gel was instantaneous and total, Weaver says. "It was 100 percent effective. The compound irritated the birds' feet. As soon as they landed, they were affected. My crews never saw any more birds roosting afterwards."

After some months, however, the gel began to lose some of its tackiness. "The area beneath the overpass gets soot, dust and dirt from the cars whizzing by," he notes. "Birds began returning, so we applied it again"—with the same results.

Birds simply don't appreciate Bird Proof Gel. "The tacky substance sticks and they struggle to lift their feet. But there's no indication of it causing them pain," he adds. The discomfort keeps the birds away for good.

"The product has worked for us without harming the birds to our knowledge," Weaver says. "It's the first and only commercial product of this type we've tried. We used liquid Bird Proof Gel, too, on some of the ledges that were hard to reach. We had the same positive results." Weaver says the liquid Bird Proof Gel is applied using an ordinary spray bottle.

"Probably every city faces this kind of problem with birds," he notes. Weaver suggests that cities could use Bird Proof Gel in parking garages as well, where the ledges and rafters are similar to an overpass. "We used it on a service area, where birds were roosting above a retracting metal garage door. We applied Bird Proof Gel on the seal of the garage door. It worked instantly."

Keeping the Bird Traffic Moving Out

"I have a supply of Bird Proof Gel on hand," Weaver reveals, "in case we need to re-treat the area again." He believes in the Boy Scout's motto, "Be Prepared." In fact, Bird Proof Gel has made believers of Weaver and his staff of ten traffic signal and electronic technicians. "We had good results. The product did what we hoped it would do, and we'll continue to use it," Weaver says. Also, he concludes, "our cleanup costs have been reduced to nothing." All's clear in the Clearwater overpass.