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Scaring off winged pests

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Thousands of visitors flock to the city-operated Kansas City Convention and Entertainment Centers every year, and, until last fall, so did thousands of starlings. “Birds were everywhere — in the trees, around the buildings, on the rooftops,” says Dean Barrett, building operations manager. “The birds were out of control, and the sidewalks were a mess.”

The starlings were attracted to the 2-million-square-foot facility because it is conveniently located between downtown, where the birds roost at night, and a train terminal used largely to transport livestock to market, where the birds feed. They would stop at the convention center to rest during their commute.

Often, the birds flew into the exhibit hall while the loading dock doors were open during set-up and breakdown before and after each convention. And, building maintenance crews frequently had to powerwash sidewalks to remove bird droppings. “People couldn't walk into the buildings without getting into bird droppings — either underfoot or overhead,” Barrett says. “We do lots of food service in the centers, and the last thing you want around food is bacteria from bird droppings.”

To curtail the starlings, crews cut down some trees, but that only moved the birds briefly until they found additional perches and landing spots. Next, Barrett and his staff tried to remove the birds using air horns and scaring them off by hanging flashy objects in the trees, but that did not work long with the bothersome birds.

In July 2006, Barrett purchased a sonic bird repeller made by Chicago-based Bird-X that plays recordings of the birds' distress calls to scare them away. “We wired sonic repellers into trees, on the buildings and at the loading dock doors. This stopped the birds from getting inside and eating on the floor,” he says. “Repellers were easy for our crew to install, and they were effective immediately. We had different sounds with different frequency settings, and we tried them all. Birds' nesting habits are ingrained, and you must be diligent in your efforts to discourage them.”

At the bottom of the buildings and at the top of the facilities' columns, Barrett also installed stainless steel spikes as a physical impediment to pigeons. Since installing the equipment in August, the bird problems at the facility have reduced considerably, and maintenance crews no longer need to clean up droppings as often. “We've had significant cost savings in terms of the manpower we used to expend in cleanup,” Barrett says.

Project: Bird infestation reduction

Jurisdiction: Kansas City, Mo.

Agency: Kansas City Convention and Entertainment Centers

Vendors: Chicago-based Bird-X

Date completed: August 2006

Cost: \$1,000

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