

Seagulls Are A Growing Nuisance At Marine Terminals, Docks

BY BARRY FAST

If you've spent more than a decade living and working around our inland waterways, you have probably noticed a significant increase in the seagull population. Seagulls seem to be everywhere in the Great Lakes, in the recreational lakes of the upper Midwest, throughout the Mississippi River basin and the major river systems that feed Ole Man River.

It doesn't seem natural that one sea bird family (Laridae) has invaded such a vast interior section of our continent, far from their salt water origins. It doesn't seem natural because it's not. Along with this unnatural population explosion are some serious safety issues. Rats with wings? Probably an accurate nickname for seagulls.

Seagulls have always inhabited inland waters in small numbers, their population density limited by available food, by migratory patterns and climate conditions. They usually arrived by accident, blown inland on

powerful Pacific or Gulf storms, or lured to the interior by unusual natural events.

The most famous of these was the 19th century "Miracle of the Gulls," the term the Mormons assigned to the fortuitous arrival of thousands of seagulls, devouring a plague of crickets that threatened to destroy their crops. It certainly felt like a miracle at the time, but as the seagulls feasted on the crickets, they crossed hundreds of miles of western landscape. After the cricket event, many seagulls remained in the Great Salt Lake, but are now feasting in fast-food parking lots and landfills. This is just one example of how resourceful these birds are, how adaptable, intelligent and resilient.

There is much to admire in seagulls, from their graceful flight patterns to their ability to improvise and even teach each other (observe how they learn to drop clams and mussels on hard surfaces, and from increasing heights if the shells don't crack). But it's their very success at

adapting to the burgeoning human infrastructure, our landfills, our solar panel arrays and our large flat-roof buildings that is creating health and safety problems in our workplaces, our homes and recreational activities.

In large numbers, seagulls are major polluters. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention refers to seagulls as a "disease vector." Contractors that specialize in cleaning up seagull waste require their workers to wear Hazmat suits and use respirators to avoid inhaling airborne pathogens contained in seagull feces. Formerly pristine lake beaches are now threatened with summer closings because of seagulls searching for picnic leftovers in the sand and waters' edge.

High E. coli counts in these lakes are not from overflowing sewers; they're from too many seagulls.

At a 2010 Infectious Diseases Conference in Atlanta, Ga., two French scientists presented a paper on the first comprehen-

sive study of seagull pollution on beaches in Europe and America. Seagull feces samples from a Miami, Fla., beach yielded significant levels of E. coli, salmonella and viruses. Overall, about 14 percent of seagull waste was infected with pathogens. Some of these are antibiotic resistant. And it's gotten worse since then.

Scientists have recently identified dangerous levels of histoplasmosis (also called Ohio River Valley Fever) in dried seagull excrement, which can cause a fungal infection in our lungs if inhaled. Wherever a seagull infestation exists, it is highly likely there is a human safety issue. The unnatural modern seagull diet, our garbage, our rotting food waste, is the primary cause. Seagulls leave their white splats on sidewalks and people track pathogens into cars, offices, and ultimately their homes. Especially in the rain.

Seagull excrement is highly acidic, damaging to roof material, shortening its lifespan by up to 30 percent. Once nest building takes place, usually March or April depending on your latitude, seagull problems can morph from unsightly pollution into a serious interference with productive work, including attacks on people that are actually dangerous.

Under the Migratory Bird Act, seagulls are a protected species. People are not permitted to take harmful action against them without a permit. Last year, Seagull Control Systems Inc. designed and delivered a seagull deterrent system to eliminate a seagull nesting site on top of a fuel tank at a Great Lakes power plant. When workers accessed the platform where they measured fuel levels, they were viciously attacked by seagulls protecting their nests. The tank had to be taken out of service until after the nesting season, a significant disruption to the workflow at the plant.

At another seagull deterrent project in the Great Lakes region, seagulls were nesting in abandoned fields adjacent to an employee parking area. Seagulls attacked workers walking to their cars, and fouled the vehicles with their white splats. A falconer was hired to scare the seagulls out of their nesting area. Instead, the gulls attacked the falcon in force, driving the valuable trained predator away, and ultimately killing it. Nesting seagulls can be a real safety hazard. The best strategy is to make your building or property a location where seagulls feel unsafe, well before nesting activity begins.

There are only two proven strategies to make your property permanently hostile to seagulls. These are best described as exclusion methods and deterrence methods. Every other method is either ineffective from day one, or produces only a temporary or minimal improvement. Among these failed methods are noisemakers, fake predator calls, cannons and similar products designed to annoy or scare the seagulls away. They are very effective at annoying people. Seagulls, not so much. Gulls thrive in noisy locations, from ocean waves crashing against rocky cliffs to dozers, payloaders and other large vehicles pushing garbage around a solid waste operation. If seagulls did not adapt to the loud beep-beep of reverse vehicle operation, the roaring bulldozer

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For more information, call Mark Schnobelen, vice president, at **314.821.0042** or send an email to: mschnobelen@massman.net

Kansas City Headquarters
8901 State Line
P.O. Box 8458
Kansas City, MO 64114

816.523.1000 office
816.333.2109 fax

St. Louis Regional Office
12412 Rott Road
St. Louis, MO 63127
314.821.0042 office
314.821.0760 fax



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engines, the scream of landing jets, there would be no seagulls at landfills and airports. Fake predators are recognized as fakes in a few days, as are scary balloons, flags and other failed annoyances.

Exclusion Methods

To prevent seagulls from landing on roof peaks (seagulls don't like to land on a sloping roof, just the peak), ledges, parapets, beams and other narrow roosting locations, parallel lines of wire strung a few inches above the surface are the best solution. Seagulls' webbed feet cannot grasp wires so they can't land where the wires are strung. Spikes are very effective at keeping seagulls from landing on top of light poles, pilings, narrow ledges and beams. There are other effective products that a seagull control expert can prescribe for your problem.

Deterrence Methods

Transforming a safe and comfortable seagull environment into a location where they feel threatened is best accomplished with a grid wire deterrent system. Wires are strung high enough over a flat surface to avoid interference with people moving about or working, above a flat roof, dock, solar panel array, outdoor dining area or similar open space. If the wire grids are designed and strung correctly, seagulls will not land beneath them. This system gives seagulls a form of avian claustrophobia. This is the method recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Service as the only permanently effective, non-harmful seagull deterrent technology. It is not a net, which can entangle seagulls and other birds. Grid wire systems are low maintenance and, where aesthetics matter, can be unobtrusive. For piers, river terminals, warehouses and similar seagull infested facilities, they are the best solution.

How To Seek Expert Advice

If seagulls are damaging property, creating an unhealthy work environment, damaging vehicles, fouling walkways and docks, or degrading roofs with their acidic waste, it's time to consult an expert. Dealing with seagull problems is a specialized field within the bird control/pest control industry. Because most problem birds are terrestrial, such as pigeons, starlings, crows and vultures, consulting a professional who has specific experience with seagull infestations is recommended.

Read websites carefully and critically. Warranties beyond a year are rare but worthwhile, and a written promise that the solution will permanently end the seagull problem is a reasonable request. Make sure that it is understood and agreed upon the deliverables, and on details such as maintenance and warranty requirements.

A few seagulls on and around your facilities are a natural part of the inland waterways environment. But when the population growth and location of seagulls begins to feel like an invasion, it's time to act. Get rid of the seagull problem before your work area becomes polluted and the cleanup is expensive. Working around heavy equipment in a marine environment has enough intrinsic safety concerns.

Barry Fast is managing partner of Seagull Control Systems Inc.

Weld Training Program Pays Off For Superior Industries

By DUSTY WEIS

While some manufacturers face a shortage of skilled welders and long delays in filling open positions, Superior Industries in Morris, Minn., has deepened its pool of qualified workers with an uncommon—yet direct—approach to solving the problem.

Superior Industries engineers and manufactures groundbreaking, bulk material handling equipment and cutting-edge components. From its headquarters in Morris, the manufacturing firm supplies bulk crushing, screening, washing and conveying systems for industries including construction aggregates, mining, bulk terminals, agriculture, power and biomass. The 45-year-old Superior also has engineering and manufacturing plants in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nebraska, and Alberta and New Brunswick, Canada.

"You can't just go and pull someone off the street and throw a welding gun in their hand and say, 'Weld me a couple pieces together,'" says Dave Dybdal, the weld train-

ing instructor for Superior and its subsidiary, Westmor Industries. "They have to know the basics and understand welding safety and blueprint-reading, and we were really having issues finding people who could do that."

So if finding trained welders is increasingly difficult, company executives figured, then why not just train eager workers yourself—and in a shorter time-frame to boot?

Dybdal says that realization was the genesis of the company's Weld Training Center, which, at its peak, has helped the company's welders pass 250 certification tests in a single year. Under his oversight, what started 10 years ago in a corner of the company's workshop quickly outgrew the on-site storage shed they next converted to house the program. Superior Industries, a member company of the Association of Equipment Manufacturers, finds great value in such a unique workforce development strategy that is easing its difficulties in finding skilled labor.

Today, the Weld Training Center has

its own campus across town with 10 weld booths, two grind booths and a classroom for instructing new and veteran welders alike. Dybdal and his team are able to certify welders on a dozen or so methods of welding, offering training that takes weeks instead of months and saving the company on the cost of keeping its workforce current on the latest welding technology.

"Yeah, it costs a lot of money to invest up front," Dybdal says. "But if you want to keep moving forward, there's no better way to do it than by investing in your own people and learning how to train and certify them yourself."

Newly-hired novices begin their career at Superior partnered with an experienced welder on the factory floor for several months, assisting where they can and proving to the company that they're reliable and motivated enough to warrant the investment in their training. "We're not going to invest a bunch of money in someone from Day One if we're not sure how

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