

ASK ROLF

YOUR TOUGHEST FOOD SAFETY QUESTIONS

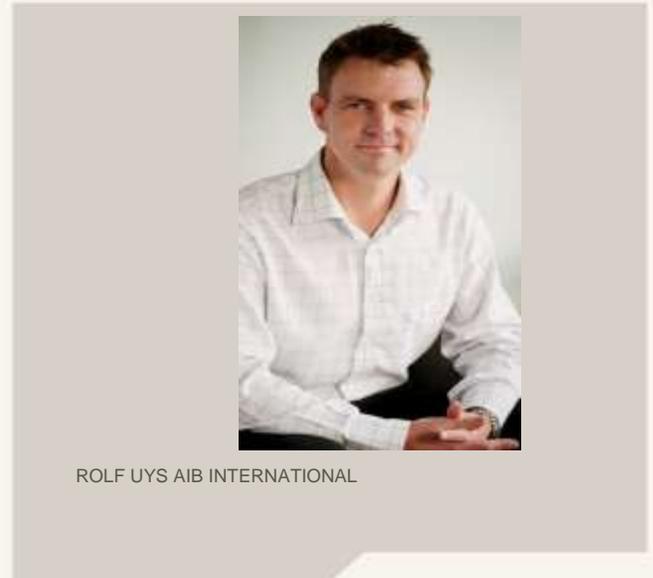
Q: I work for a large food processing company. Our biggest problem is birds. We have tried everything to control this problem and nothing seems to work. What advice do you have for us?

A: Birds are a major concern in food production and retail establishments. In my 15 years of food safety auditing, birds have probably been the no.1 cause of audit fails. The food safety risks associated with birds are largely underestimated. Bird droppings carry a plethora of pathogens that could affect the food produced or the health of employees. Salmonella being the most concerning. Furthermore, bird droppings physically deteriorate buildings and strain cleaning resources. Nests, feathers and droppings block gutters and drains that may damage buildings indirectly.

So how then does one control birds effectively? Firstly, forget about a quick fix. A long term strategy is needed whereby birds are engineered out. Quick fixes such as mirrors, lights, recorded sounds, dummy birds of prey, and other deterrents are only temporary. Initially, the birds will be cautious, but over time they will learn that there is no real danger to the deterrent and will become conditioned. Bird gels are another bad idea. This will stop birds from roosting, but soon becomes dirty, ineffective, unsightly and creates even bigger problems.

The starting point is to understand more about the pest. Define which bird species are the problem. Understand their life cycle, their habits, what they feed on, where they nest and what nesting material they use. The more one knows the easier a solution can be found.

Keep doors closed, particularly large roller doors. If necessary, reduce the size of doors to make this more manageable. One does not need massive doors in food production facilities and warehouses anymore. Openings that are large enough for forklifts and truck docking openings are normally all that is needed in modern food facilities. Budget to install high speed automatic roller doors or build double doors. Design the personnel flow so employees do not have to use large doors to enter.



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Roof/ wall junctions are another favourite entry point. Close all gaps along roof lines to deny bird ingress. Do it professionally. A roll of chicken wire and a pair of piers won't cut it. Also consider all pipe and conduit entries into the buildings as well as ventilation openings and windows.

Next, consider using bird spikes, wires and nets. This is placed in strategic areas outside to discourage birds from roosting. These techniques have proven very successful worldwide in controlling birds on monuments, statues and important buildings. Keep the outside grounds clean and tidy. If spillages are cleaned promptly, product leaks are fixed and outside skips are covered, there will be no food that attracts birds.

Finally, train personnel to understand their role in the control process. They are the first line of defence and there should be systems to report and deal with sightings immediately. Everyone should adopt a "pester the pest" approach.