

TRENDS

TRICKS OF THE TRADE ■ EDITED BY JENNIFER GRZESKOWIAK



Keeping Gulls at Bay

Landfill uses electronic device to deter birds from busy areas.

THE RHODE ISLAND RESOURCE Recovery Corporation (RIRRC) operates not only the largest landfill in the state of Rhode Island, but also the only one. In 1974, the state legislated a quasi-public corporation to create one central landfill to serve all 39 cities and towns in Rhode Island.

While centralization effectively solved a major collection problem, it created a new issue. "We have one of the largest landfills on the East Coast, with an average of 750 trucks per day tipping approximately 4,000 tons of solid waste at this site," says Bill Jasparro, physical plant manager for RIRRC. "Thousands and thousands of gulls follow the trucks into the dumping area to feast on anything they can get their beaks on."

Various species of gulls nest, raise their broods and litter the area with droppings, splattering walkways, parking lots and the windows of RIRRC's buildings clustered on 1,200 acres. "We know we can't totally eliminate the gulls," Jasparro says, "but we need to control them."

A federal and state regulation permits RIRRC to kill 500 gulls annually, which helps, but hardly puts a dent in the overall population.

"We tried many approaches," says Jasparro, who has been with RIRRC for eight years. Disruption techniques included screamers, bangers and even a series of criss-crossed tuna lines, all of which failed.

Jasparro, however, hadn't tested electronic bird repellents. When he read about a device that uses sonic technology, he called Chicago-based Bird-X Inc. A technical consultant, Joshua Sirt, recommended the company's BroadBand Pro unit, which emits distress cries that signal danger to gulls, pigeons, starlings and other birds, and produces predator cries in addition to a random combination of threatening sounds at varying frequencies and volumes.

Jasparro installed the unit on top of the tipping floor facility's roof, which is 180 feet by 350 feet. The unit also came with four speakers and visual devices, including a large, inflatable balloon called "Terror Eyes" and the "Prowler," an owl on a stand. Altogether, the package was designed to provide 10,000 square feet of coverage. He then followed Sirt's recommendations for tweaking the unit's settings for volume, frequency and varieties of predator calls.

"Within two weeks, we had major positive results," Jasparro says. "I was 99 percent satisfied, and I remain 99 percent satisfied. While the unit doesn't eliminate the gulls, it keeps most of them away from people-sensitive areas." Also, RIRRC saves \$700 several times a year by reducing outside window washings.

Jasparro now has purchased two additional units. With 12 facilities on RIRRC's landfill site, one unit will be placed on the administrative building so his boss's windows will no longer be streaked with gull glop. The other unit is destined for the new RIRRC Recovermat Facility, which already has been invaded by gulls.

"Over time," Sirt says, "birds may get accustomed to the sound effects, so you'll want to vary the settings occasionally." The technique has kept the gulls at bay for two years and counting.

— R.W. Delaney
Contributing Editor, Philadelphia

