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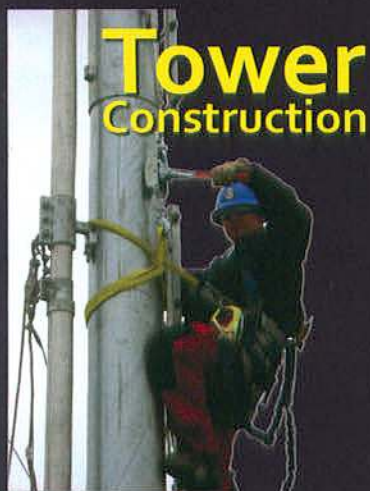
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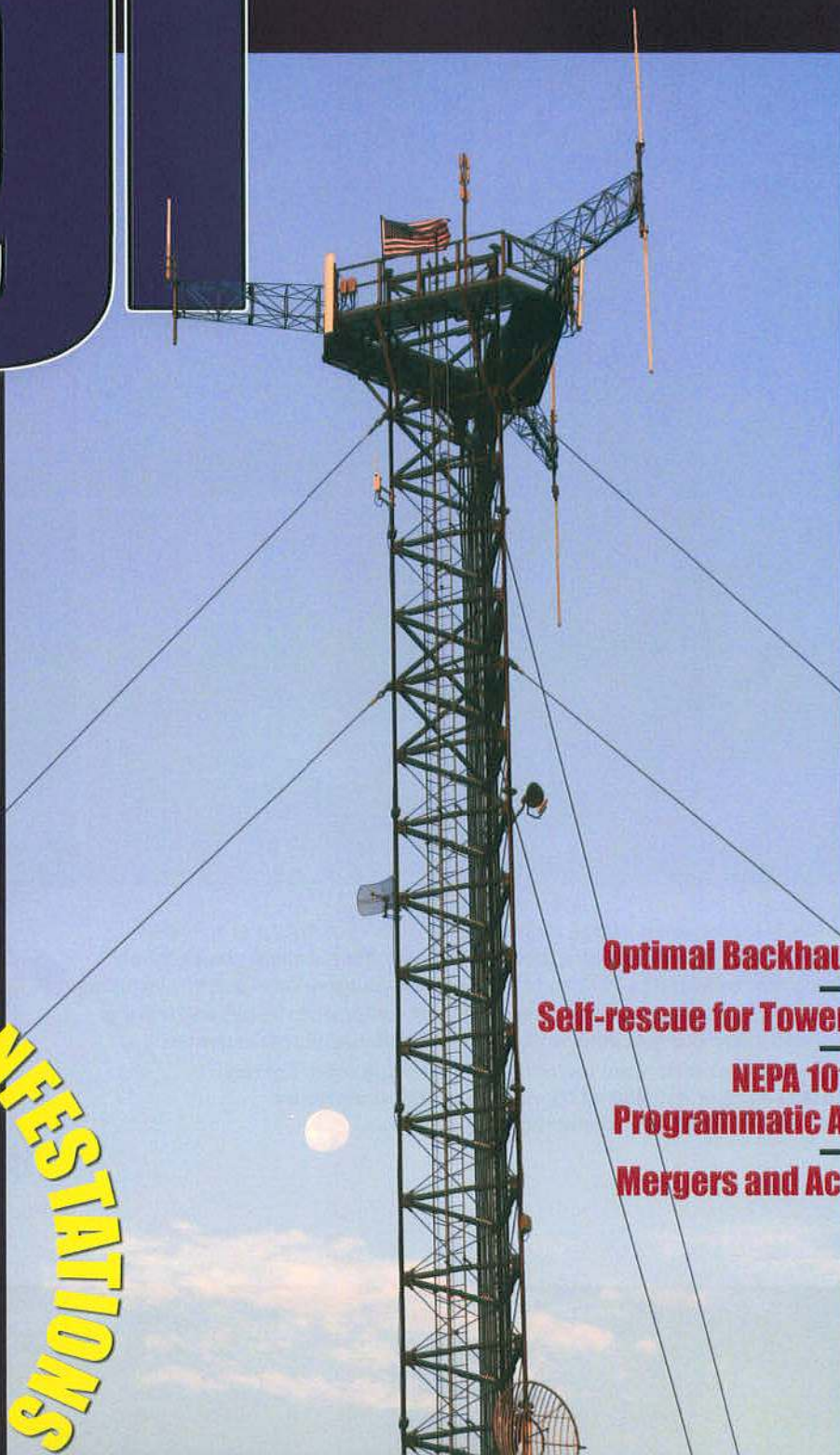
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GOPPING

with Bird Infestations on Telecommunications Towers

The use of an electrically charged track has proven effective with no harm to the birds, an important factor when dealing with such a publicly visible situation.

By Mona Zemsky



Although it seems no industry has truly been immune to the effects of the current economic slowdown, businesses involved with digital communications — ranging from cable providers to cell phone services — continued to grow,

albeit at a slower rate. According to CTIA,

in 2009, more than 285 million Americans subscribed to cellular service. And the cable industry provided more than 150 million customers with digital cable and phone service. As demand for such services continues to climb, so will the need to support these industries with telecommunications towers that will increasingly be located in closer proximity to densely populated areas.

Operators maintaining towers in residential or commercial areas may find themselves with an unexpected problem; one that's no featherweight when it comes to causing trouble: bird infestations. It's no surprise that a tower is an attractive roosting spot for a variety of bird species. What may be shocking is just how troublesome such an infestation can become, how difficult it can be to remedy and how dramatically the problem can affect an operator's relationship with the community it serves.

"When birds choose to take up residence on towers surrounded by human habitations, their occupation can become a big problem for more than just

the technicians who maintain the tower," said Cameron Riddell of Bird Barrier America, a manufacturer of bird repellent products in Carson, Calif. "The inconvenience and health risks posed by a large number of roosting birds affect people in homes and businesses around the tower and can even create a public relations nightmare for the tower operators."

Sitting here in Allentown

Scott Robbins, a regional field technician, works for a tower company that maintains its own towers and offers maintenance services to other tower companies. "A bird infestation is less of a problem if the tower is away from people, but as more towers are built in residential areas, this industry is facing an even bigger problem with birds," he said.

Robbins, who has worked in the industry for more than 20 years, has first-hand experience with how much chaos a flock of birds can cause and how difficult it can be to convince them to find somewhere else to roost. It took months of effort involving trial and error with repellent tactics that repeatedly failed and dealing with community ire before Robbins and his team dislodged a flock from a 150-foot tower in Allentown, Pa.

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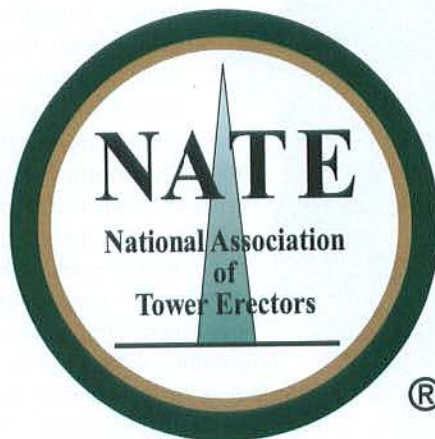
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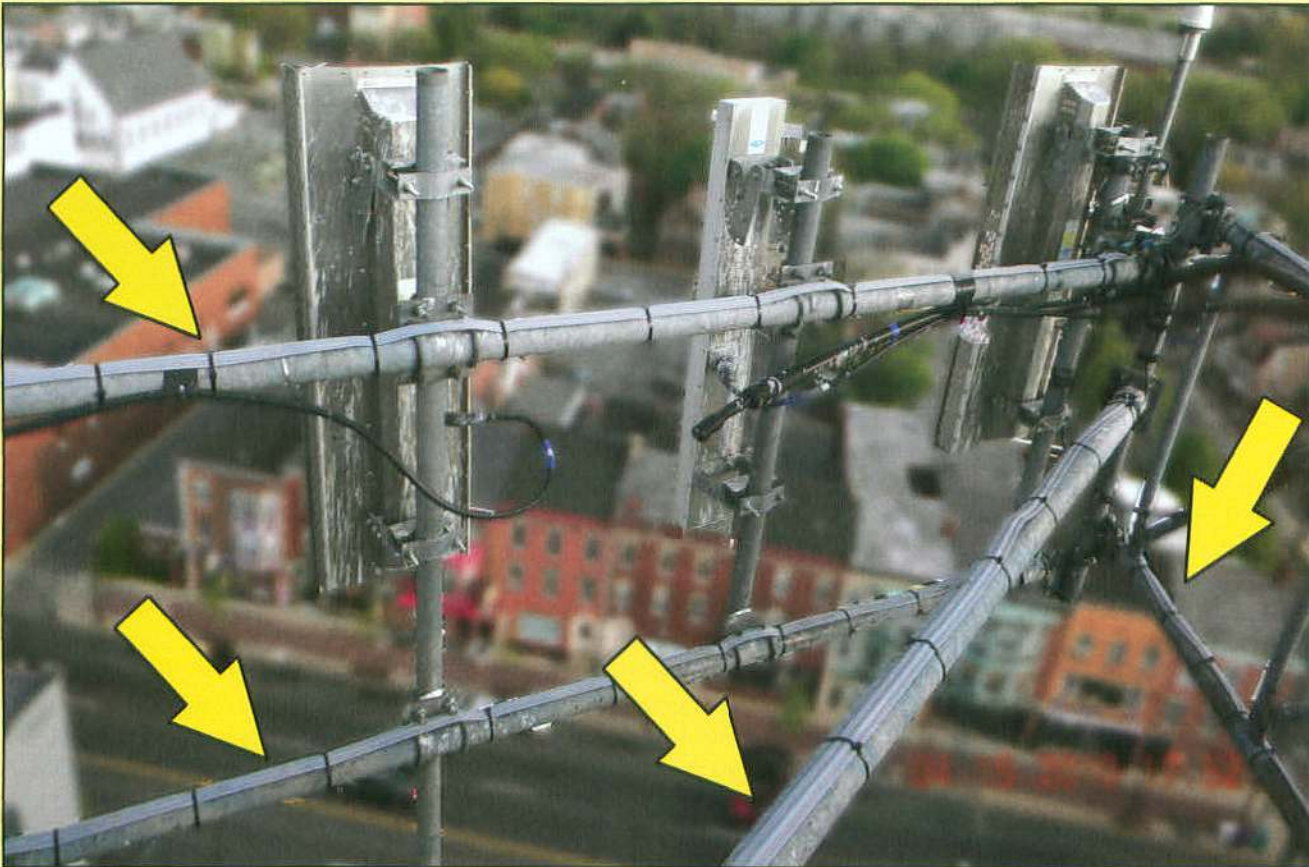
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city, with more than 111,000 residents, Allentown perches on the banks of the Lehigh River in the scenic Lehigh Valley region 60 miles north of Philadelphia. Immortalized by pop star Billy Joel in his 1982 hit song, Allentown has seen the rise and fall of many industries since its founding in the early 19th century, including iron, steel and textiles. Today, service industries employ the majority of the city's residents.

less than thrilled with the birds. Such a large number of fowl in an area of high human population can create a range of problems from potential health problems associated with droppings to the cost of cleaning waste from cars, equipment and walkways. In fact, the problem of droppings became so bad that one area business allowed employees to expense one car wash a week to compensate them for the cost and inconvenience of

course, you want to do this as humanely as possible," Robbins said. "You don't want to harm the animals; you just want to convince the wildlife that they want to be somewhere else."

Riddell said lethal methods would almost certainly not solve the problem of a bird infestation. "Killing the birds already in residence only means you create opportunity for new ones to move in," he noted. "A far more effective and



It's kind of a disgusting photo, what with all the bird droppings. But that's the point, after all. Arrows point to electric-shock bird control system tracks installed on the tops of the antenna-mounting pipes. These tracks carry low-current, high-voltage electric pulses that shock birds — harmlessly — through their feet, deterring them from roosting.

Robbins' company owns and maintains a 150-foot tower in the heart of Allentown, surrounded by businesses and residences, including the home of the city's mayor.

A starling opportunity

From the perspective of a bird living in an urban environment, a tall tower is the perfect roosting spot, providing a bird's-eye view, as it were, of the territory and all potential food sources, predators and threats. About 1,000 Allentown starlings found the tower appealing. Their human neighbors, however, were

cleaning droppings from their vehicles. Not to mention just how noisy a flock of starlings can be.

Furthermore, the bird infestation posed a health hazard and a risk for technicians working on the tower because bird droppings are slippery. Public outrage resulted in an increasingly hostile relationship between tower operators and business owners and residents in the area. The newspaper ran articles about the problem and the tower company received nasty letters of complaint. There was no question that the birds had to go. How to evict them was the question. "Of

lasting solution is to convince current and potential interlopers that the tower is no longer an option."

First, tower operators tried visual deterrents, installing plastic owls and cats meant to make birds think predators were nearby. In short order, the birds realized the faux fowl and felines were no threat and they resumed their residency. Next, they tried a sticky bird repellent. Chemicals in the compound are supposed to warm the birds' feet, making it unpleasant for them to remain on the tower. The substance had little effect on the birds. It did, however,

make climbing the tower slippery, dangerous and singularly unpleasant for technicians working there. Most of the birds seemed to shake off the grease, but weaker birds would become stuck in it, die and decay in place, adding to the unsanitary conditions and public opposition to the tower.

Reflective strips designed to frighten birds away with light and motion also did little to deter the birds. An audible deterrent in the form of an electronic device that mimicked bird distress calls and predator cries reduced the bird problem, but it created new stress on the tower operator's relationship with the community because the noise bothered the neighbors.

An electrifying idea

Robbins had used Bird Barrier's Bird-Shock Flex-Track electric shock bird control system once before with good results, and he thought the Allentown tower might be a good candidate for installation. The low-profile ledge deterrent system uses a low-current, high-voltage electrical pulse to deter birds. The pulse is painful but harmless. It shocks the birds' feet when they try to stand on the track. "It uses the principle of fear and flight to condition birds to stay away," Riddell explained. "The birds are not harmed, only delivered a message not to return."

The track has an extruded, flexible PVC base with two stainless-steel, braided conductors sewn to the base. It comes in 50-foot rolls. The track is available in five colors to match most applications. At 1.5 inches wide and a quarter-inch tall, the product is invisible from below. The manufacturer offers solar and plug-

glue that is available as an installation option would not stick, so installers used plastic zip ties to attach 300 linear feet of track on the top portion of the tower. Plans are under way to install

businesses in the surrounding community. The track has saved the tower maintenance company cleanup and repair costs, and man-hours dealing with the problem. Most importantly, the angry



This close-up shows the electrified track as attached with plastic grips. Glue normally is used, but a previous application of a sticky substance intended to deter the birds prevented the use of glue to attach the tracks here.

more. The track has been operating for several weeks and Robbins said results are positive. Although he anticipates tweaking the system, possibly adding timers to control when the pulse activates, it seems the Allentown tower has its bird solution. It's a solution that has proven effective with no harm to the birds, an important factor when dealing with such a publicly visible situation. "[Bird Barrier's] approach to using electric shock to deal with problem

birds has been, in our opinion, well thought-out," said John Hadidian, director of urban wildlife programs for the Humane Society of the United States. "We retain a high regard for their conscientious and considered approach in such matters."

Signs on the Allentown tower alert tower technicians to the presence of the track, which is powered off when workers are present. Sanitary conditions have improved for tower workers and for residents and

letters and negative newspaper articles have stopped, and the Allentown tower is no longer a source of frustration for its operators and neighbors.

"Bird control and cellular and cable technology share a common emphasis on leading-edge technology," said Riddell. "Today's savvy customers face a host of issues when choosing a bird-control product. Bird Shock Flex-Track eliminates many of those issues. It's virtually invisible, so it's not an eyesore, it causes no noise to annoy nearby humans, it requires little maintenance and it's budget-friendly. It doesn't harm birds and solves the problem with a one-time installation.

"The irony," Riddell added, "is that this leading-edge bird-control technology is based on principles of electricity that were established more than a century ago. Call it retro if you will — I prefer to call it 'bird free'!" **agl**

From the perspective of a bird living in an urban environment, a tall tower is the perfect roosting spot, providing a bird's-eye view, as it were, of the territory and all potential food sources, predators and threats.

in chargers that connect to the track and send the pulse to the birds' feet.

Because sticky paste previously had been installed on the Allentown tower,

Mona Zemsky owns M.Source Marketing Strategy in Chicago. For Bird Barrier, visit www.birdbarrier.com.