

FYI No. 11

PIGEONS

Pest Control And Building Decontamination

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Pigeons, because of their proclivity for nesting in buildings, and because of the toxicity associated with pigeon droppings, are an aesthetic problem and a very real health hazard. Where pigeons have infested buildings, it is often necessary to decontaminate the buildings before they can be used.

Exclusion of pigeons from buildings is the best means of avoiding expensive decontamination procedures. Pigeons thrive wherever they can eat. Where well-intentioned bird lovers feed pigeons, pigeons will gather. Pigeons can also feed in kitchen garbage disposal areas. Modification of human behavior to discourage pigeons should be part of any pigeon control program.

Pigeons are likely to nest in any out-of-the-way interior space or sheltered space that they can get to, and roost on any roughly horizontal surface. Keeping pigeons out of and away from buildings is the best means of avoiding the problems associated with infestation. Products that can help prevent pigeon infestation include:

--Lightweight plastic netting, attached to a building with stainless steel pins anchored in grout or epoxy in mortar joints. It is intended for use over eaves, niches, windows and statuary; and on ledges, column capitals, and other potential roosting areas, making landing or roosting on these surfaces impossible. One such product is Conservare "Pigeon Control" mesh netting, available from ProSoCo, Inc., Stone Mountain, Georgia; (404) 939-9890.

--Metal strips with projecting metal prongs, applied to potential exterior roosting surfaces, making landing or roosting on these surfaces impossible. One such product is "Nixalite," manufactured by Nixalite of America, Rock Island, Illinois; (309) 797-8771.

Pigeons can enter buildings by any small opening, including open or broken windows and open roof hatches. Squirrels, bats, and other pests can enter buildings by these routes and by even smaller openings. Regular maintenance of a building's shell, including attic spaces, is necessary to prevent such

infestations.

Various other measures of pigeon control generally are not effective, and are not recommended. These measures include synthetic snakes, owls, or other predators; repellent gels; ultrasonic devices; strobe lights; and electrified wires.

Decontamination

Accumulations of bat, rodent, or bird excrement in old buildings can be a medium for the development of pathogenic fungi which can cause cryptococcosis or histoplasmosis, both potentially fatal diseases of the lungs and central nervous system. These diseases can be latent with symptoms developing years after contact. The disease-carrying fungi are not always present in buildings containing accumulations of excrement. Advice on having samples tested can be obtained from local health departments or from the Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia; (404) 329-3749.

Because the organisms that cause the diseases are airborne, coveralls and other protective clothing and footwear which are either disposable or can be decontaminated separately should always be worn when entering buildings contaminated with bird excrement. A breathing mask capable of screening out particles one micron or greater in size should be employed and should be the last item removed after exiting a contaminated building.

Persons with a history of lung problems, diabetes, other underlying diseases, or those undergoing steroid therapy can be more susceptible to cryptococcosis or histoplasmosis. Persons exposed to buildings with significant accumulations of excrement should be examined by a physician for these two diseases. They can be treated successfully if diagnosed at an early stage.

Buildings infested with animal excrement must be decontaminated before they can be used. Decontamination must be carried out in conjunction with measures proofing against further infestation.

The following procedures have been used successfully for decontamination of buildings which have significant accumulations of pigeon or other animal excrement.

1. Decontamination shall include walls, floors, ceilings, ledges, handrails, stairs, and other exposed and unexposed or concealed interior surfaces (including bins and other personal equipment inside of structure) and exterior ledges and plenum area immediately below first floor.
2. Decontaminant solution shall consist of five percent Formalin (a base of 37-40% formaldehyde stabilized with 5% methanol) in water.
3. Decontamination is accomplished as follows:
 - (a) walls and ceilings plaster are to be wet to saturation
 - (b) floors are to be wet to saturation
 - (c) glass is to be wet using hand held sponge method
 - (d) other areas are to be saturated

Amount of run-off must be kept as a minimum.

4. The technique used will be misting of walls, ceilings, and floors where there is no accumulation of droppings. Floor areas with accumulated droppings will be saturated by spray (hose).

5. The working solution shall be applied in three (3) equal applications on alternate days. Applications will be made when surface temperature is no greater than 32 degrees Centigrade (90 degrees Fahrenheit) nor less than 16 degrees Centigrade (60 degrees Fahrenheit.) Pigeon excrement on floors, in attics, etc. is to be wet with solution and then picked up and placed in vats etc. of solution and allowed to soak for duration of period of application.

6. One week after completion of decontamination the building will be ventilated with each room having at least one open window and/or door, with care exercised to prevent re-entry by pigeons.

7. Removal and transportation of all pigeon excrement, debris, and other rubbish from the structure after completion of decontamination shall be handled in accord with and subject to regulations of local health departments. Pigeon excrement and dust removal shall be accomplished by vacuuming all floors, walls, ledges, stairs, handrails, ceilings, and all other interior surfaces. Floors will be left in broom-clean condition.

Please call the Department of Historic Resources at (804) 367-2323 if you have further questions about pigeon control or decontamination.