

# Case Study

■ MAINTENANCE

## Honk If You Hate Geese

When screamers didn't work and dogs proved too expensive, Sweetbriar GC turned to an innovative sprayable repellent to keep geese off the course

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.,  
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### Problem

Geese left their smelly droppings on the course, causing an odor problem as well as creating a new "hazard" for golfers to avoid.

### Solution

Spray **Flight Control** on high-traffic geese areas to confuse them into leaving the course.



FLIGHT CONTROL

**S**uperintendent Bill Prest's course, Sweetbriar GC, is located a mere five-minute drive from the south shore of Lake Erie in Avon Lake, Ohio. It's lovely if Prest wants to eat his lunch by the beach, but it's also in the flight path of Canadian geese.

Each spring, a pesky group of 100 or so geese settle on his course, and Prest devotes a lot of time to chasing them off. While Prest's geese problem is not enormous, it's still urgent, since the geese will pair up to nest if they aren't forced off the course.

"Geese don't forget where they've come from once they've nested in a place," he says. "It's imperative for us to make sure we remove them from the course before they get comfortable."

### The problem

The first year the geese landed on his course, Prest used screamers to control them. That worked for a while, but Prest says geese learned to avoid the noise.

"When they saw our cars pulling up, they would fly away," Prest says. "That solves the problem temporarily, of course, but as soon as the cars leave, they come back. We didn't even shoot the screamers off because the geese discovered a way to avoid them."

Prest investigated using a dog, but he discovered dogs were expensive both to purchase and maintain. With his small goose population, he decided it wouldn't be a smart investment.

So Prest agreed to become a test course for Flight Control, a new sprayable goose repellent that confuses the geese by making it

**These nasty, noisy little feces factories are the bane of many a course.**

appear that grass treated with the substance looks as if it's not edible. Flight Control absorbs ultraviolet light and sends a visual warning to geese that something is wrong with their food supply, according to the company. If geese eat treated turf, they experience a harmless — though effective — digestive irritation that reinforces the message.

Without a viable food source, geese choose to leave, says Ken Ballinger, president of Environmental Biocontrols, the Wilmington, Del.-based company that manufactures and markets Flight Control.

"The object is to make your course a place where geese don't want to be," Ballinger says.

If geese don't see a viable food source, they will not breed in the area, Ballinger says. Goslings need food immediately upon hatching, and geese are extremely protective of their young.

"I've been out on courses shortly after Flight Control has been sprayed, and I've had adult geese come after me because they sense I've had something to do with making the course unlivable," Ballinger says. "Frankly, I was surprised at the violence of their reaction."

### The solution

Ballinger says the key to Flight Control's success hinges on a superintendent knowing where the geese congregate on a course. On average, superintendents should only have to spray the substance four times a year on about four acres of their course. Flight Control costs about \$200 per gallon, depending on the distributor. That may sound pricey, but the application rate is only a half gallon per acre. Its effects usually last four weeks.

"One superintendent told me he was going to put it through his irrigation system and I dropped the phone," Ballinger says. "I begged him not to do it. It's designed to be used on small areas of the course where the geese are most prevalent."

In case a superintendent isn't sure which areas need to be sprayed the most, Ballinger says his distributors undergo training on those issues and are willing to survey a course with the superintendent so they can work out an effective treatment plan.

Ballinger says the final results on his product's effectiveness aren't in yet, but initial results have been encouraging. Flight Control received its initial label for from the Environmental Protection Agency in December 1998 for geese control, and the company is seeking a supplemental label concerning other bird control as well.

It's true that Flight Control gradually disappears as superintendents

mow, but EBI is researching what products mix with Flight Control to keep it around longer. Ballinger says the company is also testing different rates.

Prest says he sprays Flight Control once in the spring and once in the fall, and has been pleased with the re-

sults. He sprays Flight Control in 20-foot to 25-foot bands around his ponds and creeks and it does an effective job of keeping the geese away from the water. He also sprays it near tees and greens where geese are a problem. He's anxious to continue being a test course for EBI. ■

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