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TO KILL OR NOT TO KILL : THAT IS THE QUESTION

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SCHENDEL: I don't think there is a great matter of conflict yet, but we do look a little anxiously over the hill at large cattle companies being able to call in federal help in what seems to be direct competition to us, or what could be, let's say it that way. So I'm glad we do have this avenue of approach where we can deal, if we find people in a competitive situation.

BECK: I'd like to address myself to the problem you're discussing; I think that if you have any anticipated difficulty, or if you have gotten yourself involved in a contract (urban rat control, for instance) contact the state office that services your area. And if you have any question at all, I think there is room to sit down and discuss it right then. But if we don't hear from you, we assume there is no problem. I'm sure in Region 4 which is the southeastern United States, this is generally our approach, and if it isn't we want to know about it.

SPEAR: May I comment, because I've been somewhat in the middle of this? I think what we're all saying is that we need more to communicate one with another. I would encourage those who are not familiar with it to go back and read our Technical Releases 5-67 and 6-67, which means they were issued early in 1967, encouraging communication between pest control operators and state people, between pest control operators and the federal officials, because there is a street down which we all have to go and we can't possibly travel it unless we work together.

COURTSAL: I'd just like to make a comment on this, so the pest control industry will understand the problem from a state supervisor's position. We have been conducting a number of rat control dump demonstrations in different towns and cities. When we contact a cooperator because of a request, the first thing we ask him is, "Are you under contract with a PCO, or do you have a bid submitted by a PCO for this job?" If the answer is yes, we tell him we will not put on the demonstration, so that there is no conflict there.

JACKSON: Any more questions? Thanks very much Bob for a very interesting presentation. I realize that the mind can absorb only as much as the seat can bear. We're just about done; a couple of minor short things yet. One more thumbnail sketch from John Kiel.

TO KILL OR NOT TO KILL
THAT IS THE QUESTION

William J. Spitz
Big State Exterminating Co.
Houston, Texas

CHAIRMAN BECK:

This morning's session is going to be related to solutions to problems. Yesterday we heard a great deal in terms of research, disease, ectoparasites, and a lot of other problems. When you get down to it there's only one reason for research. Research is to find the answers to and the solutions to problems. Research as an end in itself is hard to justify. We're going to be talking this morning about research that is largely in the past tense, and has reached the stage where it is being applied. I think too many times we make a distinction between research and application, when in actuality good research can be applied and a good applicator never ceases to be a researcher.

You'll find the program indicates we're balancing one method against another- Avitrol vs. Strychnine, Fireworks vs. Wetting agents, and so forth. Actually the only versus that we intend to present is that which occurs in your own mind when you're weighing one method against another. In talking with the panel that has agreed to be with you this morning, we find that almost to a man they feel very strongly there is no "it" in bird control, that a good applicator needs to be well balanced and well rounded, that he needs to know, far more than one approach, that he needs to be able to understand people, biological problems, ecology, economics, and several other factors. The idea that sometimes comes across in meetings such as this is, and rightly so in some instances, "I have the final answer." Gentlemen, there is no "it" in bird control; there are many methods. To take one or two of the toxic methods and to leave out the non-toxic methods is to limit yourself to being branded as a killer, and in reality you are leaving yourself open to some serious problems. To take the other aspect, and to say we cannot kill birds because it's immoral or to be satisfied by saying that it isn't legal, is also an unrealistic approach.

These gentlemen have agreed because of their specialties to discuss one or more topics, and to present, hopefully, both sides where the material can be used and where it has less use, or the method. And we hope that when we have finished this morning we will have given you the impression that each man is presenting a part of a total picture, a part of a whole ball of wax. Bill.

Everyday you and I as business men and government officials are faced with important decisions. Sometimes making these decisions can prove to be some of the most difficult work that we do. For this reason I was particularly happy to have a simple choice "To Kill or Not to Kill," when we did bird control work in downtown Houston. I can sum up the reason for using Avitrol as opposed to poison baits in just two simple Words *"Public Relations."* That's not to say that we don't use poisons.

Let me give you some background of this story to show why the decision was so simple. The city of Houston has a courthouse like many cities around the country. It is very old. This building has many places on it that birds, particularly pigeons find very attractive for roosting, loafing and nesting. Over a period of 60 years birds become a rather severe problem on this building. Prior to our doing the bird control job there were several newspaper and television stories showing people coming to the county commissioners court offering to get rid of the birds by various means.

One man offered to trap the birds. First of all the birds did not go into his trap. Second of all, it was learned by the humane society that this man had been selling birds that he trapped at other locations to gun clubs so that these birds could be used for live targets. The use of live birds for target practice was found to be quite repulsive by the general public and therefore this man was asked to remove his traps.

Another individual came along and decided that he would put out troughs of wine. The birds would drink the wine, (supposedly) get drunk, thereby making them easily available to the supplier of wine who would then pick them up and remove them from the premises. The county commissioners laughed this out of court and said they had no money in their budget for wine. Still another man offered to get rid of their birds by rather conventional methods. He was frank to say he would kill the birds with strychnine. Well, when this program was offered to the commissioners' court there was an up-roar from many, many bird lovers. Needless to say the county commissioners who are elected politicians, decided that it would be much better to have live birds on the courthouse than to have voters clamoring to protect the birds. Prior to this time I had offered the county purchasing department a very fine proposition to get rid of the birds for a fee. The purchasing agent indicated that in view of the fact that I was on the mosquito control board, I am a non-paid officer of the county and therefore could not do the job for pay. The opportunity looked so good for good public relations that we did the job for free. I went before the county commissioners and offered to get rid of the birds. The first question that was asked of me was "Will you kill the birds?" I said no and I assured the commissioners that the populace would not find any dead birds lying around the streets. In view of the fact that the commissioners knew me personally because of my connections with the mosquito control district, they accepted the proposal.

We proceeded by a rather lengthy prebaiting program in order to get all of the birds in the area to feed on our grain. Then without notice to the newspapers or television or other media, we changed our bait to use Avitrol. This was done on a weekend. Needless to say some of the birds were actually knocked

down. However, in order to maintain good public relations, I had stationed four men for two weeks around the four corners of this building. Each man was equipped with a walkie-talkie. When a bird was losing altitude one of my men would pick him up gently and bring him to a hidden cage. In order that we might determine the actual mortality of birds if there was to be any, we brought all captured birds back to our office. Of the thousand birds that we got off the building and of more than a hundred birds that we recovered from the streets, all the birds survived but 6. These six were in the first group that were recovered. Apparently they were real gluttons and ate a very substantial amount of the grain. However, after that and since that time we have had no mortality of pigeons. You may ask if birds were found in other parts of the city. Let me assure you that we made a careful search of many roof tops in the area in order to see whether or not the birds had gone on off somewhere else to die. This did not happen. This all happened so quietly that no one really knew that the birds were gone until we suggested that they look at the building.

I must tell you a quick story. I had a walkie-talkie in my pocket beside these four fellows, and I went for a shoeshine directly across the street from the county courthouse. There's this fellow polishing my shoes and he says, "I know who you are. You're the FBI." I said, "How do you know; how can you tell?" "I see that walkie-talkie, I see them all over the place, you've got this place staked out." Here's a man who had been watching us and had not noticed what was going on right in front of him.

To the amazement of the news media the county commissioners and everyone else concerned virtually all of the birds had been removed from the building without a single complaint. Let me correct myself there was a single letter that was directed to the editor of the Houston Post. This individual had seen a bus run over a bird about six weeks after we did our initial job. By this point we had received the praises of the county officers and were riding high. The newspaper actually sent a reporter to the county courthouse. This reporter spent a half a day walking around looking for dead birds. The Houston Post wrote a reply to this citizen stating that their reporter had carefully walked the entire area including ledges of the buildings and found no dead birds.

Gentlemen the moral of my story is that if you have to contend with public relations we feel that it is certainly to your advantage to use a material like Avitrol. I'd like to stress that public relations does not only mean no bird killing in the center of town. We have large contracts with major industrial complexes. At one of them we were told by management that if we killed any of the birds, there would be no doubt that some of the men connected with a railroad switching crew would call a strike in view of the fact that they would daily feed "their" pigeons. Here again we did our work so quietly that the birds were removed without any bad public relations and certainly with no strike at the plant.

It's a strange thing that many people who normally don't care one way or the other about birds will suddenly jump to the defense of these feathered friends when some horrible ogre of an exterminator tries to eliminate birds that may be contaminating food or other products. The business man cannot afford

to have poor public relation stories written in the news media and seen on television depicting him as a *dirty bird killer*.

Again I want to say that we do use poisons when they're practical but in this particular instance because of all the play on the birds, we did not. Now I'd like to show you slides of the job that we did and of a job that was lousy public relations for the industry.

SLIDES: This is the court house, and if you look closely you can see birds all over the building. For you in the back of the room, these are not specks-these are birds. This shows only one corner of the building, and they were that thick on all four sides. This is a long distance shot, and in a moment I'll show you a close-up slide and you can see the dung is very, very deep. They cleaned it up regularly. Here's another corner and the birds are strung out like Christmas tree lights. And another shot. These were taken at different times of the day during our pre-feeding program.

Here is a view looking across the street from the courthouse. The importance is seeing the TV Cameraman. We invited the news media to go along everywhere we went, and at this moment he is taking pictures of dead birds. We wanted the public to know that birds died of other things besides bird poisons. They die of natural causes, and there were several dead birds in this particular area. We even had the news media out on the roof ledges. I'll tell you I'm scared to death of heights, but I got the newsmen to walk along with me and they saw ten dead birds on this building on the day we began pre-baiting.

This is just some of the broken eggs, dung and debris from the birds. This is now an air-conditioned building, but visualize the odor when they had to keep these windows open.

This picture was taken one year after the job was done. Several months after we had finished, the rain washed most of the dung off, and then they repainted this. Notice the dust. I deliberately did not take this picture right after the building was painted because then someone could say that you got it before the birds had a chance to dirty it up again. Dust had thickly settled here, but no bird dung.

This is the picture on the day after, the Monday after we had baited with Avitrol. You can count the number of birds on the building on two hands on the first day. From the roof of the courthouse we could scan many rooftops in the area in order to see if there were dead birds in the vicinity. There were none.

This is a resolution given to us by the County Commissioners, and over here it says, ". . .whereas said William Spitz succeeded in eliminating the pigeons through a creative and humane method." That was the key to the whole thing-we had gotten the idea of this humane method across, and the County Commissioners were just thrilled with the results.

Let me show you something where bad public relations can come into play. This particular job was done by an itinerant operator from Louisiana. Here's a new courthouse in Galveston County, a beautiful building, parts of it are still under construction.

Let's get a little closer. Can you see it yet? Look closely. It would have taken the birds 50 years to dirty up a new building that an itinerant did in a matter of a weekend. Here's a close up. Now gentlemen, this is white Texas limestone permanently stained with grease. This stain damage has been there for over a year. It looks worse today than it did then because they can't get it out. It won't wash off or scrub off. And this is why, as John pointed out, there are many tools in this business and it takes an expert to do bird work; it takes an expert to decide what tool is best to use for this particular job. The "expert" who did this job used old crank case oil with an insecticide added. He got rid of some birds, but the birds are returning, by the way, and look what he did to a brand new county courthouse. This is why it takes expertise to do bird control work.

I thank you for your attention, and I'll be happy to answer questions later on. (Discussion follows Watkins presentation.)