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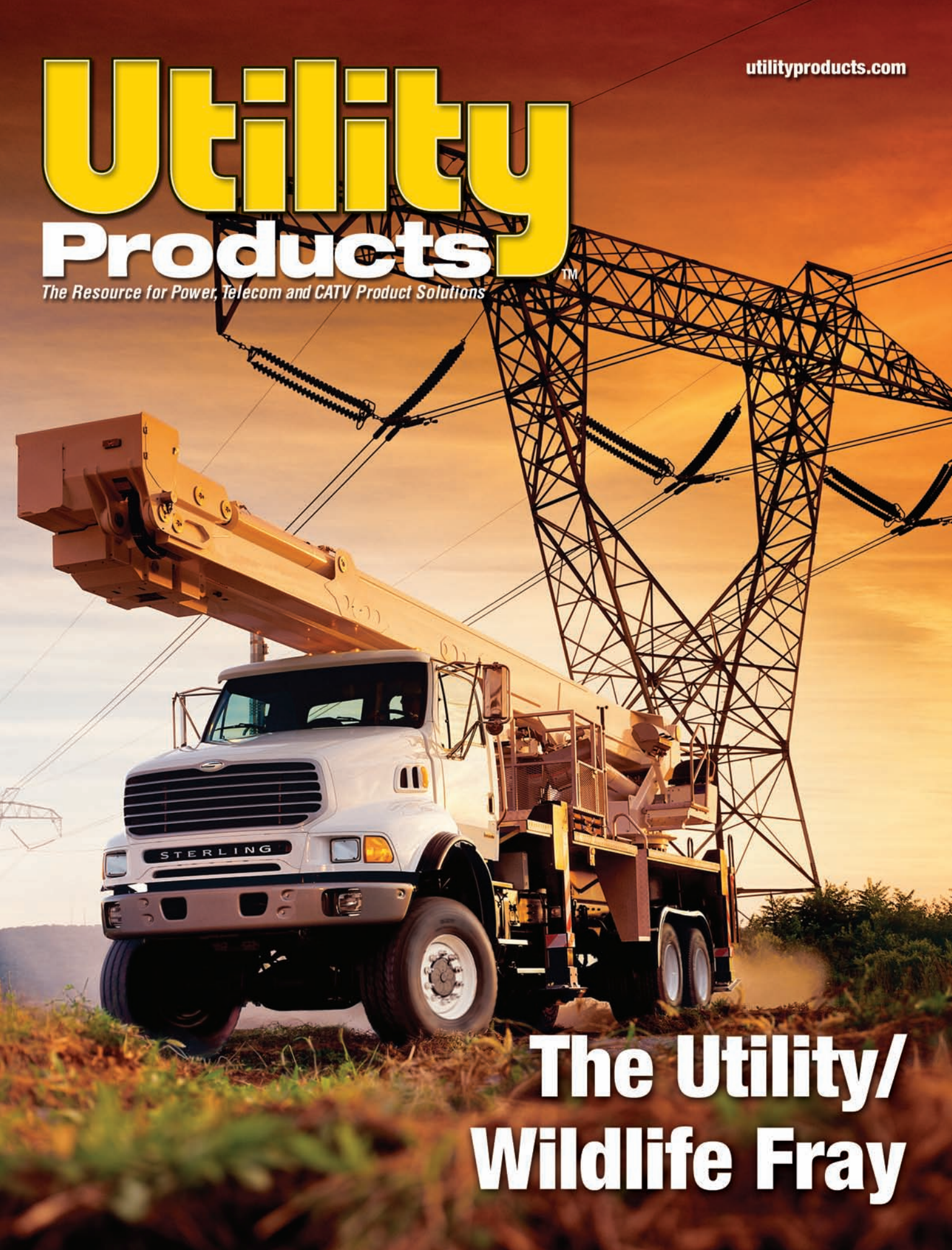

The Utility/ Wildlife Fray

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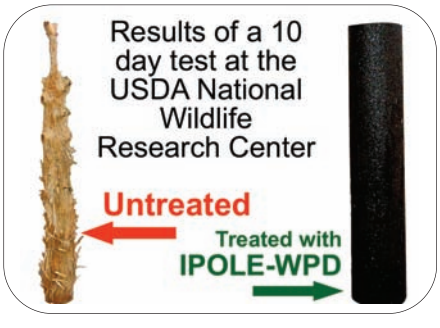


By Bob Green

Biting, chewing, scratching, gnawing and pecking critters cost utility companies and their customers throughout North America millions of dollars every year. This article will delve into the problem as well as reveal some effective solutions discovered by a Florida scientific research company. The solution uses one of the animal kingdom's greatest strengths against them to create an environmentally friendly, non-toxic deterrent that won't harm the animals.

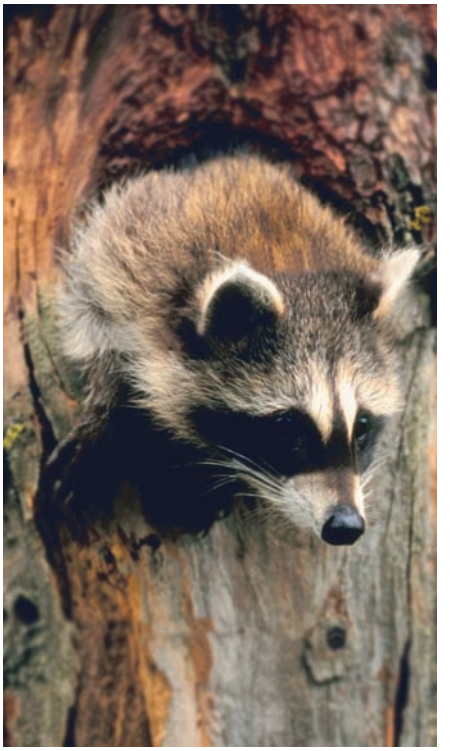
The Problem

As long as there have been wooden poles carrying communications and power lines, the battle between man and wildlife has raged on. Due to the fact that our power and communications infrastructure is a national security concern, the government has even entered the fray by funding numerous studies to find effective solutions. Icorp-Ifoam Specialty Products Corporation has participated in and drawn from over 35 years of research into the problem. They were recently in-

vited to participate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in a joint study with utility companies. The study was focused on the largest woodpecker in North America, the pileated woodpecker. These birds are about a foot and a half long and they create havoc on wooden utility poles. To highlight the problem, in a recent conversation with Jeff Combs, a line crew leader with the East Kentucky Power Cooperative, he stated, "We had one pole with a hole so big that a raccoon was (living) in it." That type of damage can weaken a pole to the point it will snap off with the first good gust of wind.

Woodpeckers are a significant part of nature's ecosystem and the holes they make in trees provide homes for many woodland creatures. The first parameter in any viable solution would require protection of the birds and the environment. In order to come up with a solution it is important to understand why the woodpecker pecks. First of all, woodpeckers are constantly on the hunt for food. They use their beaks as a type of sonar device. When they peck at the wood, they are listening for any hollow places where insects might be making their home. You might not think that chemically preserved utility poles would have such voids, but when any wood dries, it shrinks and cracks and voids do occur internally along the tree's ring lines. Hollow places indicate a potential food source and that's one of the main reasons these birds tear up the poles.

According to animal behavioral scientists, birds and animals alike have a sense of smell that can be as much as a thousand times more sensitive than humans. Icorp's solution, IPOLE-WPD™, attacks the birds' sense of smell. The results of one of the tests were pretty amazing. They put an untreated pole into a cage with one pileated woodpecker for 10 days. After that they removed the untreated pole and replaced it with a pole treated with the IPOLE-WPD. The untreated pole was nearly destroyed while the treated pole remained intact. According to Phil Landers, president of ICORP, coming up with the odor was only a part of the solution. The harder part was developing a process that would ensure the odor would remain effective for many years. They recently received a patent on that process.



Keeping woodpeckers off the poles is important, but also important is a good repair and deterrent for poles that have already sustained damage. Once again applying their skills in science, Icorp has developed an expanding filler (expanding epoxy concrete) that does a number of things to restore the pole to its original strength. First, it expands to double its size. As it expands, it heats up to temperatures greater than 300 degrees, thereby sterilizing any rot or decay in the hole. At that temperature, it becomes less viscous than water and permeates through any decay and into the good wood. Most fillers only expand and attach to the decay, but the decay is not firmly attached to the wood, therefore there is still inherent weakness at that location. When the Icorp product sets, it has attached itself to the good wood fibers, filled the hole leaving no voids to encourage future attacks, is stronger than the wood itself and to prevent further attack, is permeated with the woodpecker resistant odor. Due to the way that it is packaged, shelf life is indefinite (many years).

Since those tests Icorp has found the product to be an effective deterrent ranging from rodents to bears. Utilizing the same odorants but with some minor modifications in how the product is applied, they developed a product labeled "Sniff 'n' Stop". In a recent conversation with Eric McCollum of the Blue Ridge Electrical Coop in the northwest part of South Carolina, Mr. McCollum made the following comment about squirrels, "As far as causes of outages, they are third on the list," with the other two causes being lightning and trees. He also added, "We did an application (with the Sniff 'n' Stop) on a service that was notorious for squirrel damage. The squirrels would chew through everything - through the service wire, entrance cable, neutrals, everything down to the steel." He explained how they applied the Icorp product to the problem areas and checked it three weeks later. "There were no signs of any damage. I asked the customer who lives there if he had noticed anything. He said 'no' and that the squirrels are not even in the yard anymore. He said 'You've run 'em off!'"

Icorp is constantly testing their products on different applications to see what animals, birds and insects are affected by the various odors. Of particular value I believe is a small canister of the odorant that can be opened and placed into various above-ground and underground enclosures. In a conversation with Mr. Landers the other day, he was highly encouraged with a recent non-scientific test of the woodpecker odorant on fire ants. He described how he had taken one of the canisters, removed the lid, and laid it on its side atop a fire ant hill. The fumes are heavier than air and he was curious to see how the ants might respond. The next day the entire colony was gone. This is obviously not to be construed as a scientific claim, but at the outset it is highly encouraging.

Also, will it be effective against killer bees, snakes, black widow and brown recluse spiders, etc.? These are all potentially deadly problems that line crews would really like to see go away. If Icorp can solve them with safe to handle, environmentally-friendly products it is my opinion they will be a very welcome supplier to the utility industry for a long time to come. Once again, wherever utilities and wildlife collide, battles have raged. Wouldn't it be nice to have a peaceful solution that would leave a healthier and safer work environment with more reliable utility services? ❑

Sniff 'n' Stop®

Wildlife Deterrent

Animals can smell Sniff'n'Stop - *humans can't.*

Works on animal's keen sense of smell.

Proven effective

Long-lasting protection

Patented time-released odorant

Environmentally friendly

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Woodpecker Deterrent

Rodent Deterrent

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