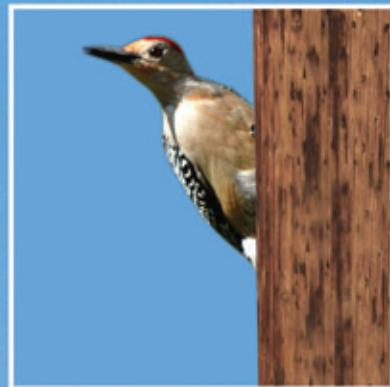


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## FEATURE

# How To Achieve 99.998%

*Woodpecker Damage  
Prevention*





# How to Achieve 99.998%

By Bob Green



If woodpecker damage was once a problem on your wood utility poles and now it seems to have gone away, don't get too comfortable. George Patrick, transmission line supervisor for Santee Cooper in South Carolina, stated that prior to hurricane Hugo in 1989 they had a serious problem with woodpeckers. In a recent interview he recounted how in one area the infestation was so bad that some poles had to be changed as often as every three years. They have both the pileated as well as the red caucated woodpeckers in their area. After the big hurricane they saw a significant drop in woodpecker activity. George commented, "We suspected maybe the loss of the birds themselves - the population. Also the density of the forest was greatly reduced and a

lot of the remaining trees were damaged. Due to the infestation of insects on the dying trees, that pulled the birds to those trees and away from our poles." When asked if the birds returned after a period of time, he responded, "I estimate three to five years, but they have come back." Other utilities along with government studies have noted similar patterns.

Now the birds are back but Santee Cooper was fortunate to find a relatively inexpensive way to quickly and permanently repair any damage as well as deter future attacks in the area of repairs. They started using it about five years after the Hugo disaster and now it has become an integral part of their maintenance program, helping them to increase their reliability rating as well as lower maintenance

costs. According to Mr. Patrick, "Within Santee Cooper we have a reliability goal of 99.995 for our transmission facilities. It's what we refer to as ASAI, which stands for Average Substation Availability Index. What that relates to is about 26 to 27 minutes of outage time per each one of our stations." That is an impressive goal but even more impressive is that they have already exceeded that goal. According to Laura Varn, V.P. of corporate communications for Santee Cooper, "We achieved that and got 99.998 in 2005". She went on to say, "We hear a lot from industrial customers moving here that they want that reliable power."

It is this writer's opinion that more manufacturing companies, especially those who have done any business in



China in the past few years, are acutely aware of the cost to business of power shortages. In today's highly competitive "just-in-time" business environment, any disruption could spell a corporate disaster. Astute manufacturers are taking hard looks at power reliability ratings before making location commitments. Beyond the businesses and the jobs and the tax base they bring, just the quality of life that we enjoy in America depends on a constant flow of affordable energy.

Santee Cooper's transmission line crews have a lot riding on their shoulders and it's a challenge they don't take lightly. As opposed to waiting for infrastructure to fail, they proactively look for signs of damage early on. The old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure cer-

tainly plays true in this environment. "Our poles are inspected annually with a ground patrol and twice a year we inspect the poles with a helicopter air patrol. We are actually checking them three times a year," comments Mr. Patrick. He continued, "Right now our transmission system is two-thirds of the state of South Carolina. We have over 60,000 poles in our transmission system which is 4,500 miles of transmission lines at voltages of 69kv, 115kv and 230kv."

This article started out by detailing the problem woodpeckers were to Santee Cooper both before and after Hugo. Had they not found the solution they did, much more of their resources would have been consumed with the cost of replacing poles. George stated, "When we look at our maintenance costs and our transmission operations we are always looking at ways to reduce those costs. If we have a woodpecker infestation that affects the integrity of a utility pole, depending on the type of structure, it could cost us upwards of \$20,000 in materials and manpower and equipment to change that out." He continues, "With this I-Foam product we can go out there and probably for \$500 make the repairs and extend the life and the integrity of that structure maybe another 10 to 15 years."

Hmm, \$20,000 minus \$500 leaves \$19,500 for a whole lot more preventative maintenance. The I-Foam manufacturer also makes a variety of putties and paints impregnated with the patented odor deterrent that has been proven effective in tests by the National Wildlife Research Center.

At this point in the conversation, Laura added, "It takes two individuals 10 to 15 minutes to make it work and it is so much more cost effective. We have had good success with it to date." When asked whether there had ever been a failure with the I-Foam, George commented emphatically, "No. We've had poles to break and they broke in places other than where the I-Foam was applied."

When queried about what type of woodpecker damage would require repair, he said, "We look for holes that have penetrated through the preservative on the pole. Anything that is deeper than about two to three inches we are going to look at making

some type of repair using something like the I-Foam." If there is any excess product from a three pound kit, it is smeared around the repair and works effectively to deter the birds from coming back to that area. He continued, "One other thing that's important to mention is that there are no special tools and it is an environmentally-friendly product as well. We put that as an important part in reviewing the prod-



uct - that it does not affect the bird other than deterring them to go somewhere else to look for food and find a home." How much do they use annually for those 60,000 poles in woodpecker country? "There's 12 three-pound kits in a case and we order 150 cases" annually.

In a conversation with Phil Landers, president of I-Corp (the company that produces the I-Foam for Santee Cooper), Mr. Landers was excited about a new patent-pending additive he is currently working on that can go far beyond what the I-Foam has done for deterrence. He is hoping to team up with one or more pole manufacturers and/or preservative chemical manufacturers to test his latest creation. He believes that adding this deterrent to the preservative chemicals for wood utility poles will produce a pole that no woodpecker, squirrel, rodent, bear, etc. will want to get very close to because of the odorant. It will not be noticeable to people, the cost will be minimal, it won't harm the animals and it will be environmentally-friendly. Creating critter proof wood utility poles would be profitable to utility companies, the customers they serve and of course the forests it might save for other purposes - like homes for all those woodpeckers, perhaps. □



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