POISON PIGEON POOP


The effects of biological materials on indoor air quality include a catalog of disease organisms and illnesses known to be associated with pigeons and pigeon waste. These include:

- Allergic Hypersensitivity pneumonitis or "Pigeon breeders disease." Frequently misdiagnosed as pneumonia, some forms of this disease can lead to permanent impairment. Once sensitized, a person may react to extremely low, even unmeasurable, concentrations of pigeon-generated dust.
- *Cryptococcus neoformans* (a yeast) may cause mild pulmonary infections or skin lesions in healthy people or encephalitis in immune deficient individuals. This disease affects 6% of all HIV-infected persons. Untreated, the fatality rate is high.
- *Histoplasma capsulatum* (a fungus) grows in soil near droppings. Symptoms occur 3 to 18 days after exposure. Its severity can range from asymptomatic to a flu-like respiratory illness. A small percentage of people develop a form of the disease that resembles tuberculosis which can worsen over months and years. The rarest form of the disease is histoplasmosis, a potentially fatal infection.
- *Aspergillus fumigatus* (a fungus) is especially dangerous to immune deficient people. Healthy people exposed to it can develop allergic aspergillosis, a severe hypersensitivity lung condition.
- *Chlamydia psittaci* (a bacterium) causes a disease called "Psittacosis." Its severity can range from asymptomatic to a severe and fatal pneumonia.

Other fungi and bacteria found in feathers, droppings and/or dead birds include *Paecilomyces, Mucor, Rhizopus* and *Bacillus*, and *salmonella* (food poisoning) bacteria.

- Ectoparasites found in the feces and nesting wastes can include chewing lice, fleas, ticks and mites, some of which bite humans (e.g., the northern fowl mite).

Clearly, waste materials we see every day can harbor deadly micro-organisms. Cleaning large amounts of such waste should be left to trained workers wearing protective equipment including respirators, Tyvek® suits, and gloves.

For small amounts (e.g., a nest or two and no thick waste deposits), good hygiene and precautions can prevent exposure. Clean up this material by soaking with a 1:10 bleach solution first so that dust will not get airborne.* Wear goggles and gloves to prevent eye and skin damage from the bleach.

For a complete list of precautions, see "Histoplasmosis: Protecting Workers at Risk" (NIOSH publication #2005-109). Call 800-35-NIOSH or http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/publistd.html.

* Note: This sanitary clean up method is used in ordinary buildings. If it is used on historic buildings, precautions must be taken to keep the bleach from soaking into historic building materials.