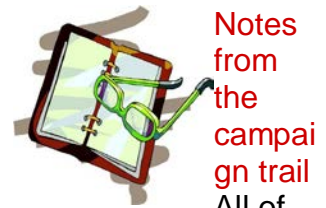




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Wednesday, May 17, 2006

Pilots express concern about landfills

Birds make flights hazardous, pilots say

Armed with dramatic photos of the damage done to a plane that collided with a bird near **Austin-Bergstrom International Airport**, members of the **Texas Aviation Association** took their complaints about the **IESI** landfill in southeast Travis County to the **Austin Airport Advisory Commission** on Tuesday. Several pilots asked the board to pass a resolution calling for the immediate closure of that privately-run landfill, along with an adjacent city-run landfill that's already scheduled for closure.

"We're here to prove Type IV landfills attract birds, primarily turkey vultures" said TAA President **Jay Carpenter**. He then played a series of videotapes shot in October of 2004 outside the IESI site showing large birds flying over and landing on the landfill. "These birds love that landfill. They're there almost every day. We're playing Russian roulette with the air safety of our public."

While no IESI representatives were at the meeting, the company has previously strenuously denied that its site is a special attraction for birds (see In Fact Daily, October 29, 2004). The landfills, which were in place before the city moved the airport from Robert Mueller to Bergstrom, were converted to receive only construction-related debris. Carpenter, along with **Robin Schneider** with the **Texas Campaign for the Environment** told the commission there were several possible reasons why birds were still attracted to the landfills, including the underlying organic waste from the site's previous use as a Type I landfill or construction workers depositing their fast-food waste in with construction debris.

While Schneider has taken her concerns about the two landfills to the city's **Solid Waste Advisory Committee**, local pilots have a new burst of enthusiasm for closing the landfills because of the experience of **Dr. Stephen Becker** on April 22. Becker was taking off from ABIA when he noticed "a pair of buzzards" pass in front of his Cirrus SR22 single-engine plane. "To my total amazement, one of them smashed into the outer part of the wing...the result of that was the outer part of my wing being split open, forcing us to make an emergency landing," Becker said. He displayed his flight path for the commission, using data collected from his plane's GPS tracking system, which showed his collision with the bird over the landfill. "At least in my mind, there's no question where I was. I guess to some extent it's open to debate whether it is a totally random occurrence to hit a turkey vulture right over a landfill in central Texas."

Becker said he believe the strike was not random, but was related to the landfill. "I hope that the commission and the City Council and whoever has control over the landfills will take this issue seriously and do something about it, if something can be done, before we have something more serious than this loss of property."

Statistics provided by city staff show a total of 202 bird strikes reported by pilots since ABIA opened. Of those, seven were considered to be large birds similar to the incident described by Becker. "There are over 225 commercial airline takeoff and landings each day at the airport, and there are about 1,600 general aviation movements each month," said Aviation Department spokesman **Jim Halbrook**. "Of the seven large bird strikes, two of them required 'Alert 2' landings by the pilot....and they all landed safely."

Commission members seemed receptive to the pilots' complaints, with Chair **Hannah Riddering** requesting that next month's agenda include a resolution on the issue of bird strikes. Commission Member **Carolyn Lowe** specifically requested data about the frequency of bird strikes at other, similar airports for comparison. **react**