

Complaint Regarding Violation by WindowAlert of Google's Advertising Standards

WindowAlert is a Google advertiser. (Footnote 1) It claims to be an effective system to prevent fatal bird window collisions in homes. It violates Google's misrepresentation policy, specifically:

"(by) Making inaccurate claims or claims that entice the user with an improbable result (even if this result is possible) as the likely outcome a user can expect"

WindowAlert inaccurately claims

1. Its product will effectively protect birds from deadly window collisions. It advises installing the decals spaced 12" apart." This claim "entices the user with an improbable result " that such widely spaced decals will prevent bird deaths. Decals are effective only when placed 4 inches apart oriented in vertically and 2 inches horizontally.(Section 1 Below) This standard is recognized in building codes in Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary, Vancouver, Portland, and San Francisco. (see Section 1 Below)
2. WindowAlert's claim that its UV product "glows like a stop light to birds" makes an "inaccurate claim that entices the user with an improbable result." (Section 2 below)

The footnote references refer to the document "Footnotes" at <https://birdfriendlyyards.net/google-complaint/#googlefootnotes>

General background Bird collisions with residential windows cause several hundred million bird deaths annually, about 44% of all bird window collision mortality. (Footnote 2) Unfortunately, between 30 and 70% of consumers cite WindowAlert type decal as their choice. (Footnote 3)

Background: Why Spacing Matters. Dr. Daniel Klem, the leading U. S. expert on bird window collisions explains:

Scientific studies have repeatedly confirmed that clear and reflective windows are invisible to birds. They are killed hitting these invisible barriers trying to reach habitat seen through or reflected on their surface. Only by uniformly covering a window with an effective strike-deterrent pattern will birds see and avoid it. Research also has repeatedly validated that effective strike-deterrent patterns consist of elements separated by 2" in horizontal rows or 4" in vertical columns.(Footnote 4)

It is not correct that one or two decals on the window will at least alert the birds. Decals do not alert birds. They perceive all the area around the decal as empty. If the space around the decal is greater than 4 inches they simply fly around the decal and hit the window. See the photos at Footnote 12.

Background to Complaint #1 Misleading Spacing Advice – WindowAlert recommends the following , “Concentrate decals at center then work out, placing decals at a minimum on every two feet of glass.” (Footnote 5)

Birds will not fly through a space that is too small. Twelve (12) inches is such a large space that birds will think that they can fly through it and will hit the window. A vertical row of decals spaced 4 inches apart effectively prevents birds from colliding with windows. Since WindowAlert recommends 12 inch spacing only birds with a wing span of 12 of more inches wide will be dissuaded from flying through the window. Twelve inches is 3 times wider than the scientific standard. In addition to the text cited above, WindowAlert site photos also its show its decals very widely spaced. (Footnote 6)

WindowAlert recognizes that its spacing does not follow the scientific standard. It adds to its text advising spacing every 12 inches, the following “for maximum protection, scientific studies suggest placing decals two inches horizontal by four inches vertical from one another.” (Footnote 5.)

This statement misrepresents the scientific facts. The 4” spacing is not the “maximum” needed for protection. It is the minimum – i.e. one which provides “complete or near-complete avoidance.” (Footnote 4)

WindowAlert’s pricing demonstrates that it does not expect its “maximum protection” language to be followed. The large set of windows shown in Footnote 6 with 12 inch spacing, has only 7 decals a cost of about \$7-14. If spaced at the scientific 4” standard, it would require 45 to 54 costing between \$39 and \$75. This five (5) times the consumer’s expected cost. (Footnote 7)

Also, as the diagram at Footnote 8 shows, if the WindowAlert color version were applied at the 4” spacing, the visual interference is such that very few would buy them. There are cheaper more scientifically validated effective systems that interfere little with the view out the window. WindowAlert could modify its spacing advice at no cost.

Window Alert has recognized that its spacing advice is not scientifically valid in an exchange with the science staff at the American Bird Conservancy (ABC). ABC states:

“We have not included WindowAlert on our birdsmartglass.org page because of the spacing issue. We spoke to them about this, and (they) were willing to modify their recommendations somewhat, but not enough to meet our minimum spacing guidelines. (Footnote 9)

The complainant has also attempted to convince WindowAlert to change its advertising by setting up a conversation with the nation’s leading expert on window collisions.(Dr. Daniel Klem) Window Alert refused to change its spacing recommendation.

Background to Complaint 2.

WindowAlert claims that is ultraviolet feature – “glows like a stop light to birds” (Footnote 10)

Since many birds in many situations do not see ultraviolet shapes, it does not “Glow like a stop light.” It makes “claims that entice the user with an improbable result (even if this result is possible) as the likely outcome a user can expect”

First, WindowAlert has refused to provide detailed information about its UV product, so it cannot be tested.

Even with species that can see UV light, testing in Europe has found that anti-collision materials that rely on UV reflectance are ineffective. (Footnote 11)

Claims that its customers that WindowAlert’s decals prevent bird window collisions are merely anecdotal. Sound science is not based on such reports. Birds in fact hit windows with Window Alert decals as seen in the photos in the footnotes. (Footnote 12)

Summary: Window Alert’s advertising clearly violates Google’s advertising standards by:

“Making inaccurate claims or claims that entice the user with an improbable result (even if this result is possible) as the likely outcome a user can expect”

For any follow-up questions contact jimcubiel@gmail.com or 843-991-1059.