

The Silent Killer

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It makes no sound and has no smell. Polytetrafluoroethylene (Teflon fumes) is deadly for your birds. A bird's size and lung capacity make him more sensitive to the toxins in our environment. It was for this reason that coal miners would take a canary down into the mines with them. If the bird became sick or died, they knew it was dangerous for them to be in that mine.

Polytetrafluoroethylene is known by the brand name Teflon and most bird owners realize that using products that have this coating cannot safely be used around birds. However, there are many other brand names that are also polytetrafluoroethylene. Some of these are: Silverstone, Fluron, Supra, Excalibur, Greblon, Xylon, Duracote, Resistal, Autograph and T-Fal are just a few. These coatings are used primarily to keep things from sticking.

The San Antonio Zoo in Texas lost 21 birds in an outdoor aviary awhile back. Their death was caused when the birds gathered by lights that the zoo had installed so that the birds could warm themselves in an outdoor aviary. The bulbs had been coated with Polytetrafluoroethylene. Phillips standard red heating lamps have a coating of Teflon. The FDA now requires that bulbs be given a Teflon coating as a shatter shield when used around food. If you are planning to use a light to help warm a brooder or keep a sick bird warm, look it over carefully and read the box to see if Teflon has been used. If it does not have a box or does not say it has a special coating, check the bulb itself. The Teflon coated ones have a bubbly or cloudy surface. They may use one of the other brand names for Polytetrafluoroethylene so remember that just because it doesn't say Teflon it doesn't mean that it is safe to use around birds.

PTFE was discovered in 1941. Basically this is a plastic. Teflon is the trademark for a tetrafluoroethylene resin with a high resistance to heat and corrosive chemicals. It was originally used in wire insulation, cable spacers, gaskets and in other applications in the chemical industry. It then became popular as a non-stick coating for cook ware.

In 1951 the first case of human suffering from tetrafluoroethylene problems was reported. It produces flu like symptoms in humans. The tetrafluoroethylene lingers long after the product has been removed. It can remain in carpeting and draperies for some time.

Birds die an extremely painful and agonizing death when exposed to these fumes. This product may not kill all the birds at the same time. The toxins travel on air currents. The current can by-pass one bird and come in contact with another. The fumes swirl on these air currents similar to the way that smoke would. The bird does not have to be in the room where the fumes originate as they can be carried into various parts of the house on these air currents. Smaller birds can take less of the fumes than a larger bird, but even a small amount of exposure can kill a large bird.

When the report first circulated about Teflon causing bird deaths, it was thought that very high heat was needed to release the deadly fumes. Now there are reports that temperatures as low as 285 degrees can cause death to birds.

Teflon starts emitting fumes from the start of heating. It does not have to be a high temperature or for an extended length of time to cause death to your bird. Small birds breathing these fumes for only a few seconds took as long as 24 hours to die.

Many people think that Teflon is only dangerous if the pan burns. This danger lurks in other products besides cookware. These do not have to operate at a high temperature to cause damage to your birds. I have listed some products that use polytetrafluoroethylene. Not all of these use this coating nor are these the only places that it is used. Carefully read all products that you buy before you use them around your bird. If in doubt, call up the manufacturer and asked what he has used in the product.

Some Products That Use Polytetrafluoroethylene

Heat lamps

Portable heaters

Sole plates on irons

Ironing board covers

Burners on stove tops

Drip pans for burners

Broiler pans

Griddles

Many cooking utensils

Woks

Waffle makers

Electric skillet

Deep fryers, crock pots,

Hot air popcorn poppers

Coffee makers

Bread makers

Non-stick rolling pins

Lollipop molds

Corkscrews

Never-Stick-Stainless Steel

Stockpots

Roasters

Non-stick gingerbread molds

Pizza pans

Tortilla presses

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