

Background for Google Complaint

Summary -WindowAlert is a major barrier to providing consumers with an effective product to protect birds against bird window collision deaths. It is clearly ineffective. It is especially damaging because surveys show that between 30-70% of the public chooses this type of product. It violates Google's advertising policy.

WindowAlert violates current standards for effective spacing of a window collision prevention systems. Specifically it recommends that its decals be spaced 12 inches apart – 3 times the 4 inch standard. Its ineffectiveness is compounded by its popularity. According to two surveys, between 30 and 70% of the public think of such decals as the first option to prevent bird window collisions. Thus a huge percentage of all the outreach work we do on websites, in presentations, and through videos and handouts is wasted.

Further, its online advertising crowds out the other products which meet the 4" spacing standard. Many nature stores continue to stock them.

What to do about this?

Convince WindowAlert to Change There have been conversations between ABC and Dr. Klem trying to convince WindowAlert to change its advertising. It has refused. All of our public education reaches a few hundred people while WindowAlert is reaching thousands through its online advertising. WindowAlert could modify its spacing advice or redesign its product so that it could be installed at the 4" spacing without completely obscuring vision out the window

False Advertising It is Google's policy that advertising a product as effectively protecting birds from collisions, when it does not, is clearly false advertising. One of the examples it uses fits WindowAlert to a "T." Its policy is stated fully at <https://support.google.com/adspolicy/answer/6020955?hl=en>

Google states that in general:

We don't allow ads or destinations that deceive users by excluding relevant product information or providing misleading information about products, services, or businesses.

One of its examples of the kind of ads it does not permit are:

Unreliable claims

The following is not allowed:

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

This language clearly describes WindowAlert’s advertising. It claims that if its decals are installed at 12 inch spacing, it will effectively protect birds against collisions. This result is both “improbable” and an “unlikely outcome.”

The Draft Complaint The attached draft complaint explains how WindowAlert makes “unreliable claims.” It has been reviewed by Dr. Klem. The complaint itself is limited to 1,000 words. There is also a document called “footnotes” which provides background material that could not be included in the complaint. It also shows screen shots of the misleading advertising at WindowAlert’s site.

“Maximum Protection” Phrase Not Serious. Some of you may be aware that after advising 12 inch spacing, WindowAlert adds the phrase “for maximum protection, scientific studies suggest placing decals two inches horizontal by four inches vertical from one another.” This simply is weasel language. Nowhere on its site does it show its decals installed at 4” spacing. For instance, WindowAlert shows a large set of picture windows covering about 28 square feet with only seven decals. (see footnote document for photos.)

The complaint, which is attached, further explains why WindowAlert does not expect this language to be taken seriously. Applying its product at 4 inch spacing costs 5-10 times as much as is shown on its site. Also, if it showed its product at 4” spacing no one would buy it because it would so block vision out the window that it would be completely unacceptable to the consumer. This is a point that Mike Measure and Brendon Samuels have made in a document which this complaint largely repeats.

Joining or Supporting the Complaint. When the complaint is submitted, the person making the complaint is listed by an email address.

Dr. Klem and I will be submitting the complaint, but I would like as many of you as possible to authorize me to add your email addresses identifying you as a complainant.

If you are unwilling to take that step, I would like as many of our community as possible to support it.

All I need is an email saying “I support this effort asking Google to apply its advertising policy to the WindowAlert product.” Please send it to me at jimcubiel@gmail.com

If you are a scientist please identify yourself by organization or by your specialty.

You will be listed in a media release, unless you indicate that you do not want your name in that material.

If you can use your organization name, please do so.

Individual - identify yourself in some way “Bird safety advocate with _____” or “bird safety advocate located in _____.”