

# Ivanpah Solar Plant Becomes Bird Incinerator, Graveyard

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Some say that the casualty numbers are overhyped. Other say it is a serious problem. But at the Ivanpah Solar Plant in Nevada, birds are bursting into flames. The bizarre occurrences happen when the bird's flight paths take them into the ultra-concentrated beams of sunlight produced by the panels at the plant.

On spec, the plant seems like the very ideal of energy production for the future: three gleaming towers, forty stories in height capturing the energy from the sunlight reflected by five acres of massive mirrors. All told, the plant generates some 390 megawatts of power from its turbines. The Tomorrowland-esque scene, however, is marred by the sight of passing birds being set alight from the rays generated by the plant, leaving little more than a scant trail of white smoke.

Workers at the plant have dubbed the avian casualties "streamers." According to federal biologists, approximately 6,000 birds die each year, either from collisions or from being set aflame, as they hunt for insects around the plant.

The folks at the Ivanpah plant are not unmindful of the carnage, and have tried to find ways to cut down on the casualties. Efforts have included replacing the floodlights at the plant with LED bulbs to attract fewer insects, and rearranging the mirrors to reduce the hazard to the birds. NRG Energy Inc., which operates the plant, has also equipped the towers with devices that spray a derivative of grapefruit juice to deter the birds; outfitted the towers with speakers that provide a noise deterrent, and have employed ant-perching spikes to the frames of the towers.

Amedee Brickly, deputy chief of the Fish and Wildlife Service's migratory bird program stated: "It may take another nine months of data to determine what is actually going on at Ivanpah in terms of bird mortalities and the effectiveness of various deterrents. Eventually, we hope to transport what we learn to nations around the world developing their own solar energy programs."

Adding to the wildlife woes at the Ivanpah plant, coyotes have been eating the roadrunners that become trapped by the fences installed to keep the federally protected desert tortoises out of the plant. The company plans to cut holes in the fences large enough to allow the roadrunners to escape onto the property, but small enough to keep the coyotes out.

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