Grass management at airports
Trilo grass management at airports

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1. How to maintain your grass between the runways

Airports around the world have large grass areas up to 1200 ha. All airports have their own problems depending on their own specific circumstances. But what we have learned by studying grass management is that they all have the same problem in common: how to manage wildlife and FOD in the grass area at airports. Wildlife like birds but also rabbits, hares, foxes and sometimes roes. Grass fields are habitat for a number of high-risk bird species, providing safety while these birds feed, rest and breed. Hazardous species such as geese, gulls, waterfowl, starlings and lapwings use short-grass fields for feeding and as safe areas. Some airports have a tall grass policy and some a short grass policy.

Facts tall grass policy

- In tall grass it is more difficult to find food for birds
- When flowering, seed heads attract birds
- In tall grass, smaller birds can’t see their predators
- Tall grass attracts bigger wildlife like hares and rabbits that can hide themselves
- Tall grass attracts larger birds (migration in spring and autumn)
The average cutting height at an airport is 20 cm

Grass growing pattern

3. Why cut and collect?

- Reduces food availability for animals
- Less insects
- Not fertilization from grass clippings
- No grass clippings blown away by the wind onto the runway
- Cut grass and collect FOD at the same time
- No build up of dry grass

How to achieve this

All Trilo grass collectors are equipped with a vacuum turbine. The advantage of this turbine is that you can cut the grass under all conditions, even when it is very wet. Another strong feature is that the TRILO grass cutter pulls the grass straight up and then cuts it off. Therefore TRILO can cut grass up to a height of 25 cm.

How it works

The advantage of using a grass cutter with a turbine is that it cuts and collects grass clippings and FOD in one single pass. Old grass clipping are a habitat for insects, which attracts birds, snakes etc. So it needs to be collected in order to remove habitat for insects and therefore wildlife and also so that there will be no fertilization from the clippings which creates grass growth.
Old grass clippings are a habitat for insects and rodents.

The cut and collect system is the way to maintain the grass surface next to the runway, taxiway and apron.

Cutting area next to the runway and taxiway

Grass cutting and collecting between apron and taxiway

Cut and collect at 15 cm (6 inch) and FOD in one single pass.

The apron taxiway between the runway and taxiway is usually much smaller than the runway and taxiway. The jet engines easily pick up grass clippings and/or FOD, or they blow them onto the runway.
4. Wingspan

The wings of bigger airplanes can hang over the side of the taxiway above the grass area, so the engines are also close to the grass area and can easily pick up grass clippings and FOD. However with the TRILO cut and collect system you can avoid this.

5. FOD (Foreign Object Debris)

Grass and ditches collect and hold large amounts of light debris such as paper, cardboard, plastic, and various containers. Trash that often originates on terminal aprons, cargo ramps, and hangar ramps. This trash can blow back into areas travelled by aircraft unless collected in a timely manner. When you equip a TRILO collector with a suction hose you can collect the FOD from the ditches and fences. When the FOD is in the grass area it will be collected during the cutting (cut and collect).

6. Wide area grass-collector

If an airport already has a grass cutting machine, for instance a rotary mower, TRILO can offer the wide area grass collector with a working width up to 8 metres. Recommended are the 6 metre machines because the grass areas on airports are not the smoothest on average. If the surface is quite level, the 8 metre version will work. With the TRILO wide area collector you can collect grass clippings (only clippings with a maximum length of 12 cm). The machine has a capacity up to 13 ha per hour. This machine can also be set at different collecting heights to be sure to meet expectations. The TRILO wide area collector is very effective the first 10 – 20 metre next to the runway and taxiway. One pass up and down and the grass clippings are collected. This wide area collector is available with a hopper capacity of up to 20 m³.
7. Conclusions

- Cutting and collecting grass clippings and FOD in one single pass is very efficient and above all safe.
- By cutting and collecting you remove the food source and avoid the build-up of dry grass.
- Cutting and collecting in one single pass means less time on the grass-area, less disturbance for the airplanes.
- Cutting your grass frequently (topping cut) avoids seed heads in the flowering season and keeps birds away.
- High capacity wide area grass collection available up to 8 metres working width.
- Grass management at an airport is like a garden, you have to look after it.
- Cutting and collecting results in a nice presentation of your grass surface at the airport.

We trust we have helped you with the grass management at your airport, but if you still have any questions please feel free to contact us.

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