



Sticking points

Tactics: environmental activists have glued themselves to airport runways in Germany.

Perimeter security breaches by environmental activists are on the rise. Chloë Greenbank looks at the measures airports can take to address this concern.

Navigating the pushback on business aviation from climate activists can be a complex challenge for airports and their partners, but it's one that they're increasingly having to brace themselves for as escalating concerns over climate change have led to a surge in global activism.

On 22 September and marking a year since activists had blocked an access point at Paris-Le Bourget Airport, Extinction Rebellion and Attac France gained access to the dedicated business aviation hub to plant fruit trees on the tarmac in a move they said was to "prevent the ultra-rich from taking their private jets for the weekend and demand

the return of airports for the residents and the common good."

Planting trees on the tarmac hardly seems like a heinous crime, but the incident poses significant security, safety and operational concerns. The Instagram footage shows activists cutting through the airport's perimeter fencing to gain access.

It's one of many similar incidents reported in 2023. In May around 100 activists breached the perimeter of Geneva Airport in Switzerland during the annual European Business Aviation Convention and Exhibition (EBACE).

They handcuffed themselves to aircraft

once inside and brandished giant tobacco-style health warnings declaring that private jets "burn our future", "kill our planet" and "fuel inequality".

Their actions suspended flights for an hour and caused residual disruption for the rest of the day.

Similarly, in June, activists cut through fencing at Sylt Airport in Germany and vandalised a private jet with orange paint before gluing themselves to both the aircraft and the tarmac.

And in July, activists entered the parking apron of Ibiza Airport in Spain, vandalising a business jet using yellow and black spray paint, before gluing themselves to the fuselage.

Elsewhere, Farnborough Airport, the Harrods Aviation FBO at London Luton, and Milan-Linate in Italy have also been subjected to high-profile protests.

While much of the activity seems to affect European airports, business



A protest against private jets at EBACE in Geneva. Photo: Thomas Wolf/Stay Grounded, Greenpeace

“These actions can have a real impact, not just causing delays but also affecting an airport’s reputation.”

Jeremy Knochel, Global Security Manager – Aviation & Maritime, MedAire

aviation hubs in the US, including Teterboro Airport in New Jersey and Charlotte Douglas in North Carolina, have also been the target of security breaches from environmental activists.

It’s not just business jets and business aviation airports that are under attack either, although they are often considered the low-hanging fruit.

Both Dusseldorf and Hamburg airports in Germany were also subjected to activists breaching their perimeter and gluing themselves to the runway and tarmac, resulting in flight delays and cancellations at both airports for several hours in July.

Similarly, in November 2022 at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, around 500 Greenpeace members rode bicycles on to the business aviation enclave and blockaded aircraft for 6.5 hours, to express their concern about the climate crisis and noise pollution.

MINIMISING THE DISRUPTION

“Climate activists are passionate about the environment and we respect that,” says Jeremy Knochel, Global Security Manager – Aviation & Maritime at MedAire, a travel risk management solution provider.

“However, their methods can sometimes disrupt airport operations. We’ve seen everything from runway occupations to terminal protests and even online campaigns. These actions can have a real impact, not just causing delays but also affecting an airport’s reputation.”

Sean Patrick, an aviation security analyst for Osprey Flight Solutions agrees.

“Announcements from environmental activist groups will continue to target aviation installations, so airport and aircraft operators should anticipate the possibility of similar protest activity and social unrest at airports in the future with little or no predictability,” he says.

So, what sort of measures should airports be adopting to address the threat of climate activists and minimise the risk of disruption?

According to Patrick, there are several steps operators can take to minimise this risk.

“Osprey provides proactive alerts on incidents,” he says. “This includes analysis of the incidents and the wider issue as well as forward-looking forecasts on where, when and what kind of protests might occur.

“We can provide articles and case studies on the issue and also offer advice. This is usually handled on a case by case basis depending on the threat and situation.

“The response to an incident at a major international airport can be very different to one at a regional business jet airfield. These can include minimising turnaround times, pre-flight aviation security checks and ensuring that operators have flexible itineraries.

“We are also proactive in response to an incident. Environmentalist groups do look to co-ordinate action, so if we see a protest at one airport we usually advise clients that further incidents are possible elsewhere.”

MedAire’s Knochel adds: “Airports,

especially those serving the business aviation community, have a few options. Enhanced security is a given, but it's not just about tightening up, it's about engaging in dialogue with these groups.

"Transparency is key. We recommend that airports be open about their environmental impact and what they're doing to mitigate it. And of course, having a crisis management plan is crucial."

GOOD TO TALK

As leaders in aviation safety and security, MedAire is "deeply committed to understanding the broader challenges and concerns facing the sector, including environmental issues", says Knochel.

However, he stresses that MedAire's role is not to mediate between activist groups and its clients.

"Instead we concentrate on helping our

clients manage and mitigate the risks associated with various forms of disruption, including environmental protests."

The company offers risk assessments, consultation on local security professionals, facility audits and it offers training for staff.

"It's all about managing the situation effectively while maintaining the respect and dignity of all parties involved," notes Knochel.

He adds that while MedAire itself doesn't engage in active dialogue with environmental organisations, engagement between airports and these groups is crucial.

"Airports need to have an open dialogue with protestors and activist groups. It's not just about managing a crisis when it happens but preventing it from happening in the first place.

Transparency and regular updates on environmental initiatives can go a long way in building trust."

EXTENDING THE REACH

The need for aviation stakeholders to engage with environmental organisations and activists and to be more outspoken about their environmental achievements and goals is reiterated by Rana Walker, co-founder and Principal Consultant for business development and crisis management firm GR&AT.

Speaking at the British Business and General Aviation Association's (BBGA) annual conference held in March 2023 in London, she told delegates there is a pressing need for business aviation to communicate its "positive story".

She described social media as a powerful tool for businesses to use in reaching a wider audience. Activists use Instagram, TikTok and YouTube to both amplify their messaging and push their agenda, and she urged that aviation stakeholders do the same.

"Business aviation is often vilified, despite only being responsible for emitting 0.04 per cent of global carbon emissions," said Walker.

"The industry needs to be more outspoken about what it is doing to address climate change. Make sure you're heard. Shout about what you're doing, tout the benefits and make sure you're offering sustainable options."

Walker added inviting activists to the table to be part of the solution is a fundamental albeit challenging step.

The BBGA has also highlighted the need for authorities to balance the democratic right to peaceful protests with ensuring the safety and functionality of airports and those working or travelling through them.

It suggests nine general strategies that airports might employ to deter disruptive airport protest, including designated protest areas, engagement with protesters, increased security and highlighting the legal consequences of breaking the law. ■

Extinction Rebellion's recent protests have included planting fruit trees at Paris-Le Bourget.



Fibre Optic Cable

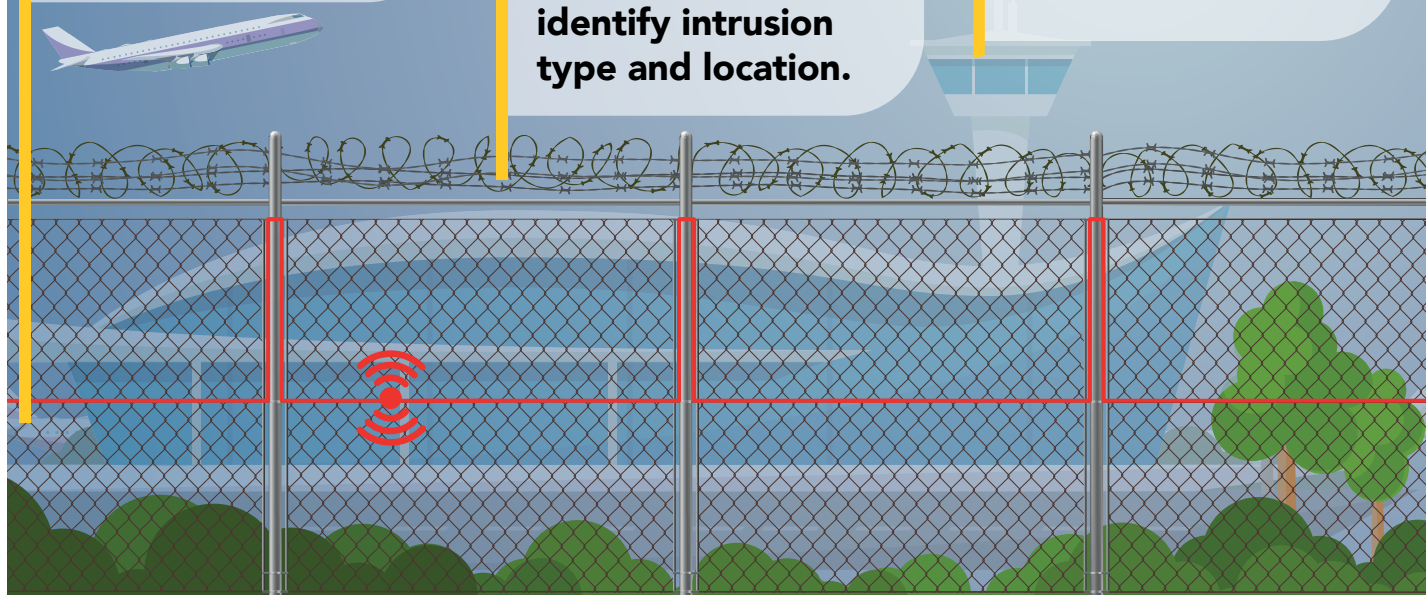
An intrusion (climbing, cutting, lifting) disturbs the fibre optic cable.

Rack Mounted Controllers

Emits and receives laser light, applies complex algorithms to detect and identify intrusion type and location.

Intrusion Alarm

Displays real-time locations of intrusion alarms on maps and/or interfaces to other systems.



Security begins at the fence

Protecting airport perimeters from security breaches is both a fundamental and critical aspect of any airport security strategy.

According to Future Fibre Technologies (FFT), perimeter security is all about deterrence, detection, assessment and action, with every airport unique in its physical layout and surrounding terrain.

To provide effective round-the-clock coverage, advanced surveillance systems incorporating technologies such as ground radar, thermal, fibre optic intrusion detection and CCTV cameras are all key solutions.

FFT has developed a complete range of intrusion detection and location products for a wide range of applications including airports.

Fibre optic cables can be mounted on any type of fence to detect and pinpoint the location of disturbances including

cutting, climbing and lifting.

Alternatively, they can be buried underground to detect even the smallest walking, crawling, digging or vehicle movement.

TOP GEAR

With airport perimeters also at risk of security breaches from vehicles being driven through them, HySecurity offers airports a variety of Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM) solutions.

Its StrongArm M30/M50 barrier arm and the HydraWedge SM50 provide an extra layer of security to airport perimeter gates, hardening them against potential breaches.

Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport in the US has installed 28 units of the StrongArm, which have enabled it to continuously operate and create revenue worth US\$ 100 million per year.

Elsewhere, the combination of video surveillance including thermal cameras

and motion detection software alongside smart fencing provides an added barrier against security breaches, with camera technology being used to monitor beyond the physical perimeter to provide an additional buffer and allow the operator to respond in real time.

According to a study by Axis Communications, which has partnered with airports including RIOgaleão – Tom Jobim and Sharjah, thermal sensors create an image using infrared radiation emitted by objects such as vehicles or persons and can detect activity around the clock, at significant ranges, and are unaffected by anything but extreme weather conditions.

In areas where thermal sensors might not prove so effective, microwave technology (radar) is a great alternative, as it offers many of the same benefits.

As with thermal technology, radar performs 24/7 with minimal false positives, allowing for cost savings to accrue over time due to less unnecessary investigative costs, as well as a smaller security team that can focus on real threats.