

Vienna Airport Prepares for the Winter: 500 Employees Stand Ready for Snow Clearing and Aircraft De-Icing

Comprehensive training in four night drills to deal with the cold season

About 500 employees and 90 vehicles are ready at any time to clear away snow and de-ice aircraft. All snow clearance procedures were thoroughly trained in four large-scale drills held during the night. If needed, an area of 2.5 million m² has to be kept free of snow and ice.

15 vehicles comprise a standard formation for complete runway snow removal

The Vienna Airport grounds which have to be kept free of snow and ice if necessary correspond to an area of 2.5 million m² or about 350 football fields. Only five centimetres of precipitation mean more than 700 truckloads of snow to be removed. The complete clearance of a runway takes place in a standard formation consisting of 15 vehicles. In the case of five centimetres of snow, clearing the entire runway from the beginning to the end takes about 25 minutes.

500 employees stand ready to clear away snow and de-ice aircraft at any time

Winter services at Vienna Airport function on the basis of an on-call stand-by team. If needed, the employees are alerted via their mobile phones and arrive at the airport in a very short time. The winter snow removal service consisting of 360 people are available day and night to clear away snow on runways, taxiways and the airport apron. This includes large de-icing vehicles for the runways used in take-offs and landings, snow sweepers for snow removal purposes as well as specially equipped tractors are available to the snow clearing service personnel. Another 70 people are employed for aircraft de-icing.

Comprehensive training process and final drills in preparation of winter

As soon as one winter season has gone by, preparations already commence for the next one. Work is already carried out in the summer to optimize processes, recruit and train employees as well as to repair, service and upgrade the fleet of vehicles and technologies. Employees have to take a final examination after concluding several trainings focusing on snow removal procedures and the handling of special purposes vehicles. At the end, all snow clearing processes including the handling of special vehicles are once again fully trained within the context of four large-scale night drills.

Efficient, environmentally compatible aircraft de-icing

In addition to the challenges posed by keeping runways and taxiways free of snow and ice during the winter months, the de-icing of aircraft plays a crucial role in the safety of air traffic. Icing of aircraft wings and fuselage can lead to stalling and thus to serious problems in flying the aircraft. The decisive factors are humidity, outdoor temperature, temperature of the wings and intensity of precipitation. The de-icing agents used by Vienna Airport are completely biodegradable and are subsequently channelled via underground drainage systems to collecting tanks for disposal. The duration of the de-icing process mainly depends on the size of the respective aircraft and thus the surface area that needs to be freed of ice. Larger aircraft at Vienna Airport are serviced by up to four de-icing vehicles at the same time to ensure the quickest possible de-icing.

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