

Selective Herbicide Applications Increase ROI on Challenging Turf at Airports



Municipal airports with steep or irregular hillside terrain often rely on annual mechanical clearing using excavators with mulching heads. While this method temporarily removes overgrowth, it creates a recurring maintenance cycle that is expensive, labor-intensive, and potentially damaging to soil structure. Because these slopes cannot be mowed safely or efficiently, they remain difficult and costly to manage year after year.

Switching to selective herbicide applications increases return on investment (ROI) by reducing the need for repeated mechanical work. Selective treatments target only undesirable brush and invasive plant species, leaving beneficial low-growing vegetation intact. Over time, this shifts the plant community toward more stable, desirable groundcover that resists erosion, suppresses woody regrowth, and requires fewer interventions.



Herbicide programs can be timed to align with weather conditions and plant growth stages, delivering longer-lasting control with less disruption. On steep slopes, limiting dangerous projects by city crews and multiple equipment passes is not just cost-effective; it is a safety decision. Transitioning from heavy equipment operations to a hybrid herbicide treatment program minimizes risk to personnel, extends the treatment window beyond peak mechanical demand periods, and significantly reduces long-term vegetation pressure. Within the first year of introducing strategic weed control applications by a qualified vegetation management contractor, airport managers can expect a break-even period between six and twelve months, depending on how frequently trees and slopes would otherwise require trimming.



Over a four- to five-year period, total cost of care drops significantly as vegetation becomes less aggressive, reapplications require less material and time, and the site becomes more self-sustaining. Municipal airports can then redirect mechanical clearing budgets toward more critical infrastructure or safety upgrades, making herbicide-based vegetation control a financially sound strategy for slope areas that are either mowed multiple times per year due to tall weeds or are too steep to mow at all.

