



FAA
Great Lakes Region, Airports Division
Safety Standards Branch

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What is the impact of ATC Operational Errors on an Airport Operator?

When addressing *Runway Incursions* (RI) the focus for airport operators has primarily been on the *Vehicle / Pedestrian Deviation* (VPD) concern and justifiably so. However, we would also like to heighten your awareness to another type of RI, one that is equally as impactful to an airport operator's personnel and equipment, the "*Operational Error*" (OE). The FAA defines an OE as:

"An occurrence attributed to an air traffic controller which results in less than required separation between two or more aircraft, or between an aircraft and other obstacles."

In the case of an OE, the airport operator may not be the catalyst for the incident or accident, but the potential for being involved and impacted by the occurrence most definitely exist. An OE can occur on the ground, as well as in the air.

Within the recent past, there have been three notable OE incidents at certificated airports in the Great Lakes Region. The details of each incident varied but essentially shared similar circumstances. In all three events:

- The airport vehicles had received clearance from the ATCT and were operating on active Runways at the same time an aircraft was cleared to land or depart by the ATCT.
- There had been a significant lapse of time since the vehicle operator and/or Air Traffic Controller (ATC) last communicated.
- The vehicle operator was either not actively monitoring the assigned frequency or the frequency assigned to the vehicle operator was different from the one used to communicate with aircraft.
- The potential for a significant accident with the loss of life and/or damage to property was very real.

Again, although these runway incursions were attributed to an OE, the airport operator's actions could have played a significant role in their prevention and enhancement of overall safety.



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What actions can be taken by an airport operator to prevent these incidents?

We recommend adopting the following 'Best Practices' to enhance safety on your airfield:

1. Establish an LOA with your ATCT to ensure that vehicles and pedestrians on an active runway are communicating on the same ATCT frequency as the aircraft for the runway (e.g. local / tower frequencies).
2. If there are periods in the day when a single ATC controller is operating local and ground control frequency, procedures should be in place to monitor both frequencies so the vehicle operators can audibly hear all aircraft movements.
3. Execute periodic radio checks (every 10-15 minutes) when conducting extended operations on an active movement area.
4. Be attentive to changes in assigned controllers. If you become aware of new voices on the frequency, check in with ATC to reinforce your clearance.
5. Close a runway whenever possible to conduct other than brief airport operations (e.g.: snow and ice control operations; maintenance activities; wildlife mitigation, etc.).
6. Issue current NOTAMS anytime conducting snow removal, mowing and maintenance operations.
7. Conduct opposite flow runway inspections. Runway inspections should be conducted toward the flow of aircraft landing and departing as much as possible.
8. Use tunable radios and avoid the use of scanning radio equipment to avoid miscommunications.
9. Implement the use of standard aviation terminology.
10. Eliminate confusing call signs for vehicles operating in the airport operations area.
11. Maintain a well defined mowing plan and procedures, including specific area "Designations".
12. Use high visibility vehicles to increase conspicuity for pilots, controllers and other drivers operating on the AOA (airport operations area).



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'Best Practices' to enhance safety on your airfield (continued):

13. All vehicle lights (high beams, flashers, beacons, and strobes) should be turned on when crossing or operating on runways, taxiways, movement areas and safety areas.
14. Ensure drivers know where to look for traffic when a pilot isn't talking to the tower or broadcasting on CTAF.
15. The Airport Operator and local Air traffic control should meet following each snow removal operation and/or any other unusual event to discuss lessons learned.
16. Determine and publish "line-of-sight" restrictions – can aircraft at opposite ends of the runway see each other or an airport vehicle?
17. Advertise seasonal crops, which might affect line-of-sight for pilots.
18. Stay alert! Situational awareness is the key to your safety.
19. Always think SAFETY FIRST!