



ACO QMax channels set into the apron at El Dorado Airport, Bogota, Colombia

Sustainable options for airport drainage and easy access

Drainage and recycling might be one of the less discussed aspects of airport infrastructure and everyday process but it is an important part of the effort to ensure operations can run smoothly and also assist in a gateway's effort to optimise its sustainability life cycle

One of the leaders in the field of the design, development and manufacture of surface water drainage systems is ACO Group, which has offices in Europe, the US, Australia, the Middle East and the Far East. ACO has been making and selling drainage systems for over 70 years and airports represent one of the many market segments in which it is active.

Frad Eton-Ehtesham, ACO's international specifications & business development manager, says that, over the last couple of years, "Our business, just like rest of the industry, has been heavily influenced by the pandemic. Costs needed to be reduced and some airport projects that we were involved in were delayed or paused.

"At the start of the pandemic we saw an unprecedented uncertainty in the market with major projects being delayed or paused.

"Despite these challenges, we have in fact been putting more resources into our airport offering by developing new products and engaging with new clients and projects," he says.

Eton-Ehtesham took on the role of international specifications manager last year. In this post, he focuses on global airports and infrastructure projects. Now: "Operating from London, with the assistance of our international technical service and the help of local ACO companies, we are now able to serve designers with specific technical, logistical and commercial support in the airport infrastructure sector."

With his strong background in environmental management, Eton-Ehtesham will help push this important element of ACO's programme.

And some work has certainly gone ahead. In terms of major projects, in just the last two years ACO has started airport projects in India, Greece, Germany and Iceland. There are also ongoing projects in South America and other regions too.

Moreover, there has been a noticeable bounce-back in the market, Eton-Ehtesham says, which he dates pretty much to the third and fourth quarters of last year (it was apparent at *inter airport*

Europe in Munich in November, for example, he says). As a result, "We have seen demand for our products for the airport sector reach record highs.

"From ACO's perspective, our discussions with those who were investing kept going during the pandemic. The global construction pause, brought on by the pandemic, allowed the industry to take a step back and make longer term plans. We are now seeing this in clients' demand for 'solutions' instead of products. And with our complete system of products, we are in a position to offer them the right solutions."

Sustainability

Eton-Ehtesham recalls that a feature of *inter airport* Europe 2021 was the interest of planners and operators regarding investment into applications supporting a more sustainable approach in the industry. "This is an area we are investing more into," he says.

"We recently introduced Qmax Neo, which is a new member of our Qmax family, designed for versatile, high-capacity slot drainage systems and popular for airport projects.

"This new product differs to the existing ones in terms of material, manufacturing and transportation. Due to its low component weight and its simple assembly, a quick installation without an additional lifting device is possible.

"Importantly, the stackable nature of the product means transport space is reduced by 75%, thus greatly reducing the carbon footprint and environmental impact of the product."

Another noteworthy new product for the company is the ACO Powerdrain. This easy-to-maintain box channel comes in various sizes, complements the Qmax for infrastructure projects and offers an alternative smaller channel for these projects.

Beside ACO's drainage portfolio, of late it has also seen strong demand for other infrastructure-orientated products like manhole covers and special covers. With the addition of the independent Detego business that now operates and is branded as ACO Detego, ACO also now

offers complex steel structures and special covers like emergency floor-exits and hydraulic ground gates. These products complement ACO's solutions for heavy infrastructure projects like airports, Eton-Ehtesham points out.

In fact, he says, ACO offers "a complete range of products for the airport market". Its ethos is built around offering an entire system chain, featuring Collect, Clean, Hold and now Reuse.

"The term 'recycling' in our world means the reuse of water. This is an important part of the ACO system chain approach of Collect, Clean, Hold and Reuse. We care for water from surfaces, such as on buildings, aprons and runways, until it is either fed back into the natural water system or treated and stored for reuse.

"With the impact of global warming, we know to expect more regular extreme weather conditions such as rainstorms and droughts moving forward," he continues. "We believe we have a system chain to help clients future-proof all their infrastructure project to better withstand these extreme conditions for decades to come."

Innovation

"Building on our global experience in this [airport] sector, we constantly innovate our offering," Eton-Ehtesham informs. "For example, we are currently heavily investing in more digitised and integrated smart solutions for surface water management, in airport buildings as well as for outside infrastructure.

"This will expand our system chain further, allowing airport management/operators to reuse collected water for green infrastructure, cleaning or other benefits – all from a central hub."

A growing product range with additional capability and greater environmental sustainability is drawing in new customers. ACO has offices in over 40 countries throughout six continents, and it is – says Eton-Ehtesham – very proud of its global reach and customer base around the world.

Moreover, today it is particularly expanding its footprint in Southeast Asia, as well as Central and South America. ■