Comité consultatif pour l'environnement de la Baie James
James Bay Advisory Committee on the Environment
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HELIPADS AND AIRSTRIPS

Proponents need a means to get to their claims when exploration begins. They frequently opt to conduct airborne geophysical surveys and to fly equipment and employees to and from their camps. Helicopters, airplanes, and their related helipads and airstrips are thus common sights throughout all stages of exploration in the field (EX-2 to DA-4 – see the diagram).

Trees and brush must be cleared and the surface must flattened (graded) to set up helipads and airstrips, and both need areas to store fuel. Temporary helipads and airstrips can be built on ice during the winter.

Helipads are normally less than 20 meters wide by 20 meters long and do not need gravel surfaces. Airstrips are typically less than 30 meters wide and 1000 meters long. Only all-season airstrips may have gravel surfaces.

The environmental impacts from helipads and airstrips vary according to their size, lifespan, and intensity of use. Many are temporary and local (e.g. noise), others may be significant and lasting (e.g. habitat destruction). Sound construction, careful fuel storage, and restoration upon closure can prevent, reduce, and reverse many of them.

Multiple federal and provincial legal obligations apply to the construction and use of helipads and airstrips. Obligations for their restoration upon closure also apply.

Images above courtesy the Cree Mineral Exploration Board and Transport Canada.
Images at left courtesy Natural Resources Canada.