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News

Innovation and Industry

Climate, environment and circular economy

Soil analysis and characterization

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Egis, IFP Energies nouvelles (IFPEN), the Clermont-Ferrand Auvergne Airport Joint Authority (SMACFA), and the French Civil Aviation Technical Service (STAC – DGAC) are officially launching SolsInfra, a major R&D project focused on understanding, sustainably managing and optimizing infrastructure soils. Yet to be fully studied, these soils nevertheless play a key role in biodiversity and carbon sequestration. The project is being supported by the ITTECOP, program, led by the French Ministry for the Ecological Transition, through co-financing from ADEME.

Green ancillary areas, such as airport grasslands, railway embankments, highway roadsides and areas beneath solar panels, cover several thousand hectares in France. SolsInfra aims to address the lack of scientific studies (or knowledge) on the quality of these soils by characterizing their microbial communities, carbon dynamics, and biodiversity through a national sampling and analysis program (Rock-Eval® thermal stability testing, DNA metabarcoding). The project will also provide a platform for testing solutions inspired by nature and evaluate their real impact on soils.

The program will involve:

- Infrastructure soil sampling campaigns led by Egis
- Numerous analyses of carbon and microbial biodiversity in French infrastructure soils conducted by IFPEN
- The implementation and monitoring of trials at several sites, including Clermont-Ferrand-Auvergne Airport and STAC–DGAC trials in Toulouse
- A preliminary outline of a Low Carbon Label methodology dedicated to these green ancillary areas

In addition, two calls for expressions of interest (CEI) are being issued to expand the scope of the SolsInfra project:

- “Are you responsible for managing green ancillary areas? Become a SolsInfra partner site”
- “Are you already conducting soil analyses? Become a SolsInfra partner lab”

Partner statements

“SolsInfra addresses a key need for our infrastructure operator clients: to better understand infrastructure soils in order to improve their management, biodiversity, and contribution to the climate transition.” — Olivier Taugourdeau, Project Manager, Egis.

“Using thermal analysis technologies such as Rock-Eval®, developed by IFPEN, and molecular biology methods, we will provide a detailed and unprecedented scientific understanding of the various carbon pools and microbial communities in these soils.” — Maira Fortunato, Project Manager, IFPEN.

“As an airport operator, we are keenly aware of the potential of these grasslands and the need to fully integrate them into the ecological transition. SolsInfra provides us with this framework and enables us to adopt a collaborative, locally-focused approach that aligns with the goals of the Clermont-Ferrand

platform, namely ‘an airport that serves its region’.”— Emmanuel Bouhier, SMACFA Director

“Airport platforms represent genuine biodiversity reservoirs. Our mission is to better understand these unique ecosystems, while ensuring aviation safety requirements are met. By participating in SolsInfra, we are helping to improve scientific knowledge of airport grasslands and to identify management practices that balance biodiversity, ecological function, and wildlife risk management.” — Constance Anelli-Mailhot, Head of the Wildlife Risk and Biodiversity Management Section at STAC.

“Soils are exposed to numerous forms of degradation, even though they serve as vital carbon sinks and habitats for biodiversity. The recent European soil monitoring law illustrates the political awareness of the challenges associated with preserving and restoring these soils. Applied research projects like SolsInfra are essential for minimizing the impact of development projects on soil and promoting best practices.” — Thomas Eglin, , ITTECOP Program Lead and Coordinator of the “Soils, Landscapes, and Environmental Impacts” cluster within ADEME’s Bioeconomy and Renewable Energies Division.

About Egis

Egis is a leading global provider of architecture, consulting, construction engineering, and operations and mobility services. We design and operate smart infrastructure and buildings that address the challenges associated with the climate emergency and enable more balanced, sustainable, and resilient land use planning.

Our 22,000 employees operate in more than 70 countries, using their expertise to develop and deliver cutting-edge innovations and solutions to our customers. Thanks to the diversity of our areas of expertise, we play a key role in shaping society and improving quality of life for people around the world.

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About IFPEN

IFPEN is the French national institute for research, innovation and training in the fields of energy, mobility and the environment. Its teams develop innovations for a low-carbon, sustainable world, covering the entire chain from scientific concepts through to technological solutions. From processes to equipment, products, software and services, the institute’s low-carbon innovations are paving the way for the energy and ecological transition and facilitating the emergence of the industrial sectors of the future. IFPEN boldly imagines and meticulously designs solutions for society's future. Rock-Eval® technology is a tool developed by IFPEN for quantifying and characterizing carbon in various matrices (e.g., soils, biochar, sediments, rocks, polymers, etc.).

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About SMACFA

The Clermont-Ferrand Auvergne Airport Joint Authority (SMACFA) owns the platform. SMACFA is made up of three local authorities: The Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region (40%) with chair and staff provided; Clermont Auvergne Metropolis (32%); the Puy-de-Dôme Department (28%). In accordance with its charter, SMACFA defines the airport’s development strategy (both air and ground operations), commits to infrastructure investments totaling €30 million under the current 2015–2030 public service delegation agreement, and determines the airport’s operating framework.

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About STAC

The French Civil Aviation Technical Service (STAC), a national-level agency of the DGAC attached to the French Directorate of Air Transport, provides technical expertise in the areas of airport infrastructure, air navigation, the environment, and safety. It works on behalf of the DGAC, the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, and, more broadly, the departments of the Ministry of Transport and other ministries. Its responsibilities include providing expertise for certifications and inspections, approving and verifying equipment, contributing to regulations and standards. It also conducts activities relating to research, intelligence and innovation. In addition, STAC provides engineering services when they do not create a conflict of interest. Finally, it oversees the government's technical activities within its remit and participates in international cooperation and training.

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