



Description and Purpose

Hydraulic Mulch consists of various types of fibrous materials mixed with water and sprayed onto the soil surface in slurry form to provide a layer of temporary protection from wind and water erosion.

Suitable Applications

Hydraulic mulch as a temporary, stand alone, erosion control BMP is suitable for disturbed areas that require temporary protection from wind and water erosion until permanent soil stabilization activities commence. Examples include:

- Rough-graded areas that will remain inactive for longer than permit-required thresholds (e.g., 14 days) or otherwise require stabilization to minimize erosion or prevent sediment discharges.
- Soil stockpiles.
- Slopes with exposed soil between existing vegetation such as trees or shrubs.
- Slopes planted with live, container-grown vegetation or plugs.
- Slopes burned by wildfire.
- To stabilize earthen berms

Categories

EC	Erosion Control	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
SE	Sediment Control	<input type="checkbox"/>
TC	Tracking Control	<input type="checkbox"/>
WE	Wind Erosion Control	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
NS	Non-Stormwater Management Control	<input type="checkbox"/>
WM	Waste Management and Materials Pollution Control	<input type="checkbox"/>

Legend:

- Primary Category**
- Secondary Category**

Targeted Constituents

Sediment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nutrients	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trash	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metals	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bacteria	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oil and Grease	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organics	<input type="checkbox"/>

Potential Alternatives

- EC-4 Hydroseeding
- EC-5 Soil Binders
- EC-6 Straw Mulch
- EC-7 Geotextiles and Mats
- EC-8 Wood Mulching
- EC-14 Compost Blanket
- EC-16 Non-Vegetative Stabilization

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- Areas seeded by broadcasting or drilling
- Temporary stabilization during high wind conditions

Hydraulic mulch can also be applied to augment other erosion control BMPs such as:

- In conjunction with straw mulch (see EC-6 Straw Mulch) where the rate of hydraulic mulch is reduced to 100-500 lbs per acre and the slurry is applied over the straw as a tackifying agent to hold the straw in place.
- Supplemental application of soil amendments, such as fertilizer, lime, gypsum, soil bio-stimulants or compost.

Limitations

In general, hydraulic mulch is not limited by slope length, gradient or soil type. However, the following limitations typically apply:

- Most hydraulic mulch applications, particularly bonded fiber matrices (BFMs), require at least 24 hours to dry before rainfall occurs.
- Temporary applications (i.e., without a vegetative component) may require a second application in order to remain effective for an entire rainy season.
- Treatment areas must be accessible to hydraulic mulching equipment.
- Availability of water sources in remote areas for mixing and application.
- As a stand-alone temporary BMP, hydraulic mulches may need to be re-applied to maintain their erosion control effectiveness, typically after 6-12 months depending on the type of mulch used.
- Availability of hydraulic mulching equipment may be limited just prior to the rainy season and prior to storms due to high demand.
- Cellulose fiber mulches alone may not perform well on steep slopes or in course soils.
- This BMP consists of a mixture of several constituents (e.g., fibers/mulches, compost, tackifiers, and other chemical constituents), some of which may be proprietary and may come pre-mixed by the manufacturer. The water quality impacts of these constituents are relatively unknown, and some may have water quality impacts due to their chemical makeup. Refer to specific chemical properties identified in the product Safety Data Sheet (may not include ecological information); products should be evaluated for project-specific implementation by the SWPPP Preparer. Refer to factsheet EC-05 for further guidance on selecting soil binders.
- A water supply is needed to refill hydro mulch equipment tank.
- Cannot be disturbed by walking or driving on the surface after application.
- Recommend using in conjunction with other BMPs (i.e., fiber rolls, etc.).

Implementation

- Where feasible, it is preferable to prepare soil surfaces prior to application by roughening embankments and fill areas with a crimping or punching type roller or by track walking.
- The majority of hydraulic mulch applications do not necessarily require surface/soil preparation (See EC-15 Soil Preparation) although in almost every case where re-vegetation is included as part of the practice, soil preparation can be beneficial. One of the advantages of hydraulic mulch over other erosion control methods is that it can be applied in areas where soil preparation is precluded by site conditions, such as steep slopes, rocky soils, or inaccessibility.
- Avoid mulch over spray onto roads, sidewalks, drainage channels, existing vegetation, etc.
- Hydraulic mulching is generally performed utilizing specialized machines that have a large water-holding/mixing tank and some form of mechanical agitation or other recirculation method to keep water, mulch and soil amendments in suspension. The mixed hydraulic slurry can be applied from a tower sprayer on top of the machine or by extending a hose to areas remote from the machine.
- Where possible apply hydraulic mulch from multiple directions to adequately cover the soil. Application from a single direction can result in shadowing, uneven coverage and failure of the BMP.
- Hydraulic mulch can also include a vegetative component, such as seed, rhizomes, or stolons (see EC-4 Hydraulic Seed).
- Typical hydraulic mulch application rates range from 2,000 pounds per acre for standard mulches (SMs) to 3,500 lbs. per acre for BFMs. However, the required amount of hydraulic mulch to provide adequate coverage of exposed topsoil may appear to exceed the standard rates when the roughness of the soil surface is changed due to soil preparation methods (see EC-15 Soil Preparation) or by slope gradient.
- Other factors such as existing soil moisture and soil texture can have a profound effect on the amount of hydraulic mulch required (i.e. application rate) applied to achieve an erosion-resistant covering.
- Avoid use of mulch without a tackifier component, especially on slopes.
- Mulches used in the hydraulic mulch slurry can include:
 - Cellulose fiber (paper- or corn-based)
 - Wood fibers
 - Cotton
 - Synthetics
 - Compost (see EC-14, Compost Blanket)
 - Straw

- Additional guidance on the comparison and selection of temporary slope stabilization methods is provided in Appendix B of the Handbook.

Categories of Hydraulic Mulches

Standard Hydraulic Mulch (SM)

Standard hydraulic mulches are generally applied at a rate of 2,000 lbs. per acre and are manufactured containing around 5% tackifier (i.e. soil binder), usually a plant-derived guar or psyllium type. Most standard mulches are green in color derived from food-color based dyes.

Hydraulic Matrices (HM) and Stabilized Fiber Matrices (SFM)

Hydraulic matrices and stabilized fiber matrices are slurries which contain increased levels of tackifiers/soil binders; usually 10% or more by weight. HMs and SFMs have improved performance compared to a standard hydraulic mulch (SM) because of the additional percentage of tackifier and because of their higher application rates, typically 2,500 – 4,000 lbs. per acre. Hydraulic matrices can include a mixture of fibers, for example, a 50/50 blend of paper and wood fiber. In the case of an SFM, the tackifier/soil binder is specified as a polyacrylamide (PAM).

Bonded Fiber Matrix (BFM)

Bonded fiber matrices (BFMs) are hydraulically-applied systems of fibers, adhesives (typically guar- or polymer-based) and chemical cross-links. Upon drying, the slurry forms an erosion-resistant blanket that prevents soil erosion and promotes vegetation establishment. The cross-linked adhesive in the BFM should be biodegradable and should not dissolve or disperse upon re-wetting. BFMs are typically applied at rates from 3,000 to 4,000 lbs. per acre based on the manufacturer's recommendation. BFMs should not be applied immediately before, during or immediately after rainfall or if the soil is saturated. Depending on the product, BFMs typically require 12 to 24 hours to dry and become effective.

Hydraulic Compost Matrix (HCM)

Hydraulic compost matrix (HCM) is a field-derived practice whereby finely graded or sifted compost is introduced into the hydraulic mulch slurry. A guar-type tackifier can be added for steeper slope applications as well as any specified seed mixtures. An HCM can help to accelerate seed germination and growth. HCMs are particularly useful as an in-fill for three-dimensional re-vegetation geocomposites, such as turf reinforcement mats (TRM) (see EC-7 Geotextiles and Mats).

Inspection and Maintenance

- Maintain an unbroken, temporary mulched ground cover throughout the period of construction when the soils are not being reworked.
- BMPs must be inspected in accordance with General Permit requirements for the associated project type and risk level. It is recommended that at a minimum, BMPs be inspected weekly, prior to forecasted rain events, daily during extended rain events, and after the conclusion of rain events.
- Areas where erosion is evident should be repaired and BMPs re-applied as soon as possible. Care should be exercised to minimize the damage to protected areas while making repairs, as any area damaged will require re-application of BMPs.

- Compare the number of bags or weight of applied mulch to the area treated to determine actual application rates and compliance with specifications.

References and Additional Resources

Construction Site Best Management Practices (BMPs) Manual CTSW-RT-24-425.11.1, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), March 2024.

Controlling Erosion of Construction Sites, Agricultural Information #347, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (formerly Soil Conservation Service – SCS).

Guidance for Temporary Soil Stabilization, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), July 2003.

Guides for Erosion and Sediment Control in California, USDA Soils Conservation Service, January 1991.

Manual of Standards of Erosion and Sediment Control Measures, Association of Bay Area Governments, May 1995.

Sedimentation and Erosion Control, an Inventory of Current Practices Draft, US EPA, April 1990.

Soil Erosion by Water, Agriculture Information Bulletin #513, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service.

Soil Stabilization BMP Research for Erosion and Sediment Controls: Cost Survey Technical Memorandum, State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), July 2007.

Stormwater Management of the Puget Sound Basin, Technical Manual, Publication #91-75, Washington State Department of Ecology, February 1992.

Water Quality Management Plan for the Lake Tahoe Region, Volume II, Handbook of Management Practices, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, November 1988.