



Description and Purpose

Straw mulch consists of placing a uniform layer of straw and incorporating it into the soil with a studded roller or crimper or anchoring it with a tackifier or stabilizing emulsion. Straw mulch protects the soil surface from the impact of rain drops, preventing soil particles from becoming dislodged.

Suitable Applications

Straw mulch is suitable for disturbed areas requiring temporary protection until permanent stabilization is established. Straw mulch can be specified for the following applications:

- As a stand-alone BMP on disturbed areas until soils can be prepared for permanent vegetation. The longevity of straw mulch is typically less than six months.
- Applied in combination with temporary seeding strategies
- Applied in combination with permanent seeding strategies to enhance plant establishment and final soil stabilization
- Applied around containerized plantings to control erosion until the plants become established to provide permanent stabilization

Limitations

- Availability of straw and straw blowing equipment may be limited just prior to the rainy season and prior to storms due to high demand.

Categories

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

Legend:

- Primary Category
- Secondary Category

Targeted Constituents

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

Potential Alternatives

- EC-3 Hydraulic Mulch
- EC-4 Hydroseeding
- EC-5 Soil Binders
- EC-7 Geotextiles and Mats
- EC-8 Wood Mulching
- EC-14 Compost Blanket

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- There is a potential for introduction of weed seed and unwanted plant material if weed-free agricultural straw is not specified.
- Straw mulch applied by hand is more time intensive and potentially costly.
- Wind may limit application of straw and blow straw into undesired locations.
- May have to be removed prior to permanent seeding or prior to further earthwork.
- “Punching” of straw does not work in sandy soils, necessitating the use of tackifiers.
- Potential fugitive dust control issues associated with straw applications can occur. Application of a stabilizing emulsion or a water stream at the same time straw is being blown can reduce this problem.
- Use of plastic netting should be avoided in areas where wildlife may be entrapped and may be prohibited for projects in certain areas with sensitive wildlife species, especially reptiles and amphibians.

Implementation

- Straw should be derived from weed-free wheat, rice, or barley. Where required by the plans, specifications, permits, or environmental documents, native grass straw should be used.
- Use tackifier to anchor straw mulch to the soil on slopes.
- Crimping, punch roller-type rollers, or track walking may also be used to incorporate straw mulch into the soil on slopes. Track walking can be used where other methods are impractical.
- Avoid placing straw onto roads, sidewalks, drainage channels, sound walls, existing vegetation, etc.
- Straw mulch with tackifier should not be applied during or immediately before rainfall.
- Additional guidance on the comparison and selection of temporary slope stabilization methods is provided in Appendix F of the Handbook.

Application Procedures

- When using a tackifier to anchor the straw mulch, roughen embankment or fill areas by rolling with a crimping or punching-type roller or by track walking before placing the straw mulch. Track walking should only be used where rolling is impractical.
- Apply straw at a rate of between 3,000 and 4,000 lb./acre, either by machine or by hand distribution and provide 100% ground cover. A lighter application is used for flat surfaces and a heavier application is used for slopes.
- Evenly distribute straw mulch on the soil surface.
- Anchoring straw mulch to the soil surface by "punching" it into the soil mechanically (incorporating) can be used in lieu of a tackifier.

- Methods for holding the straw mulch in place depend upon the slope steepness, accessibility, soil conditions, and longevity.
 - A tackifier acts to glue the straw fibers together and to the soil surface. The tackifier should be selected based on longevity and ability to hold the fibers in place. A tackifier is typically applied at a rate of 125 lb./acre. In windy conditions, the rates are typically 180 lb./acre.
 - On very small areas, a spade or shovel can be used to punch in straw mulch.
 - On slopes with soils that are stable enough and of sufficient gradient to safely support construction equipment without contributing to compaction and instability problems, straw can be "punched" into the ground using a knife blade roller or a straight bladed coulter, known commercially as a "crimper."

Inspection and Maintenance

- 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.
- The key consideration in inspection and maintenance is that the straw needs to last long enough to achieve erosion control objectives. Straw mulch as a stand-alone BMP is temporary and is not suited for long-term erosion control.
- Maintain an unbroken, temporary mulched ground cover while disturbed soil areas are inactive. Repair any damaged ground cover and re-mulch exposed areas.
- Reapplication of straw mulch and tackifier may be required to maintain effective soil stabilization over disturbed areas and slopes.

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 Bulletin #347, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (formerly Soil Conservation Service – SCS).

Erosion and Sediment Control Manual, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, February 2005.

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.

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

Soil Stabilization BMP Research for Erosion and Sediment Controls: Cost Survey Technical Memorandum, 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.