

BMP C121: Mulching

Purpose

Mulching soils provides immediate temporary protection from erosion. Mulch also enhances plant establishment by conserving moisture, holding fertilizer, seed, and topsoil in place, and moderating soil temperatures. There is an enormous variety of mulches that can be used. This section discusses only the most common types of mulch.

Conditions of Use

As a temporary cover measure, mulch should be used:

- For less than 30 days on disturbed areas that require cover.
- At all times for seeded areas, especially during the wet season and during the hot summer months.
- During the wet season on slopes steeper than 3H:1V with more than 10-feet of vertical relief.
- Mulch may be applied at any time of the year and must be refreshed periodically.

For seeded areas, mulch may be made up of 100 percent: cottonseed meal; fibers made of wood, recycled cellulose, hemp, kenaf; compost; or blends of these. Tackifier shall be plant-based, such as guar or alpha plantago, or chemical-based such as polyacrylamide or polymers. Any mulch or tackifier product used shall be installed per manufacturer's instructions. Generally, mulches come in 40 to 50 pound bags. Seed and fertilizer are added at time of application.

Recycled cellulose may contain polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs). Ecology recommends that products should be evaluated for PCBs prior to use. Refer to BMP C126: Polyacrylamide (PAM) for Soil Erosion Protection for conditions of use. PAM shall not be directly applied to water or allowed to enter a water body.

Design and Installation Specifications

For mulch materials, application rates, and specifications, see Table 3.8. Always use a 2-inch minimum mulch thickness; increase the thickness until the ground is 95 percent covered (i.e., not visible under the mulch layer). Note: Thicknesses may be increased for disturbed areas in or near sensitive areas or other areas highly susceptible to erosion.

Where the option of "compost" is selected, it should be a coarse compost that meets the following size gradations when tested in accordance with the U.S. Composting Council "Test Methods for the Examination of Compost and Composting" (TMECC) Test Method 02.02-B.

Coarse Compost

- Mulch may be applied at any time of the year and must be refreshed periodically
- Minimum Percent passing 3" sieve openings 100 percent
- Minimum Percent passing 1" sieve openings 90 percent
- Minimum Percent passing 0.75" sieve openings 70 percent
- Minimum Percent passing 0.25" sieve openings 40 percent.

Mulch used within the ordinary high-water mark of surface waters should be selected to minimize potential flotation of organic matter. Composted organic materials have higher specific gravities (densities) than straw, wood, or chipped material. Consult Hydraulic Permit Authority (HPA) for mulch mixes if applicable.

Table 3.8. Mulch Standards and Guidelines.

Mulch Material	Quality Standards	Application Rates	Remarks
Straw	Air-dried; free from undesirable seed and coarse material.	2" to 3" thick; five bales per 1,000 sf or 2 to 3 tons per acre	Cost-effective protection when applied with adequate thickness. Hand-application generally requires greater thickness than blown straw. The thickness of straw may be reduced by half when used in conjunction with seeding. In windy areas straw must be held in place by crimping, using a tackifier, or covering with netting. Blown straw always has to be held in place with a tackifier as even light winds will blow it away. Straw, however, has several deficiencies that should be considered when selecting mulch materials. It often introduces and/or encourages the propagation of weed species and it has no significant long-term benefits. It should also not be used within the ordinary high-water elevation of surface waters (due to flotation).
Hydromulch	No growth inhibiting factors.	Approx. 35 to 45 lbs per 1,000 sf or 1,500 to 2,000 lbs per acre	Shall be applied with hydromulcher. Shall not be used without seed and tackifier unless the application rate is at least doubled. Fibers longer than about 0.75 to 1-inch clog hydromulch equipment. Fibers should be kept to less than 0.75 inch.
Compost	No visible water or dust during handling. Must be produced per WAC 173-350, Solid Waste Handling Standards, but may have up to 35% biosolids.	2" thick min.; approx. 100 tons per acre (approx. 750 lbs per cubic yard)	More effective control can be obtained by increasing thickness to 3". Excellent mulch for protecting final grades until landscaping because it can be directly seeded or tilled into soil as an amendment. Compost used for mulch has a coarser size gradation than compost used for BMP C125 or the soil preservation and amendment BMP see Volume III, Section 3.1. It is more stable and practical to use in wet areas and during rainy weather conditions. Do not use near wetlands or near phosphorous impaired water bodies.

Mulch Material	Quality Standards	Application Rates	Remarks
Chipped Site Vegetation	Gradations from fines to 6 inches in length for texture, variation, and interlocking properties. Include a mix of various sizes so that the average size is between 2-and 4-inches	2" thick min.	This is a cost-effective way to dispose of debris from clearing and grubbing, and it eliminates the problems associated with burning. Generally, it should not be used on slopes above approx. 10 percent because of its tendency to be transported by runoff. It is not recommended within 200 feet of surface waters. If seeding is expected shortly after mulch, the decomposition of the chipped vegetation may tie up nutrients important to grass establishment. Note: thick applicatin of this material over existing grass, herbaceous species, and some groundcovers could smother and kill vegetation.
Wood-based Mulch or Wood Straw	No visible water or dust during handling. Must be purchased from a supplier with a Solid Waste Handling Permit or one exempt from solid waste regulations.	2" thick min.; approx. 100 tons per acre (approx. 750 lbs. per cubic yard)	This material is often called "wood straw" or hog fuel." The use of mulch ultimately improves the organic matter in the soil. Special caution is advised regarding the source and composition of wood-based mulches. Its preparation typically does not provide any weed seed control, so evidence of residual vegetation in its composition or known inclusion of weed plants or seeds should be monitored and prevented (or minimized).
Wood Strand Mulch	A blend of loose, long, thin wood pieces derived from native conifer or deciduous trees with high length-to-width ratio.	2" thick min.	Cost-effective protection when applied with adequate thickness. A minimum of 95-percent of the wood strand shall have lengths between 2 and 10-inches, with a width and thickness between one-sixteenth and three-eighths inches. The mulch shall not contain resin, tannin, or other compounds in quantities that would be detrimental to plant life. Sawdust or wood shavings shall not be used as mulch. (WSDOT specification (9-14.4(4)))

Maintenance Standards

- The thickness of the cover must be maintained.
- Any areas that experience erosion shall be remulched and/or protected with a net or blanket. If the erosion problem is drainage related, then the problem shall be fixed and the eroded area remulched.

BMP C122: Nets and Blankets

Purpose

Erosion control nets and blankets are intended to prevent erosion and hold seed and mulch in place on steep slopes and in channels so that vegetation can become well established. In addition, some nets and blankets can be used to permanently reinforce turf to protect drainage ways during high flows. Nets (commonly called matting) are strands of material woven into an open, but high-tensile strength net (for example, coconut fiber matting). Blankets are strands of material that are not tightly woven, but instead form a layer of interlocking fibers, typically held together by a biodegradable or photodegradable netting (for example, excelsior or straw blankets). They generally have lower tensile strength than nets, but cover the ground more completely. Coir (coconut fiber) fabric comes as both nets and blankets.

Conditions of Use

Erosion control nets and blankets should be used:

- To aid permanent vegetated stabilization of slopes 2H:1V or greater and with more than 10-feet of vertical relief.
- For drainage ditches and swales (highly recommended). The application of appropriate netting or blanket to drainage ditches and swales can protect bare soil from channelized runoff while vegetation is established. Nets and blankets can capture a great deal of sediment due to their open, porous structure. Nets and blankets can be used to permanently stabilize channels and may provide a cost-effective, environmentally preferable alternative to riprap. One-hundred percent synthetic blankets manufactured for use in ditches may be easily reused as temporary ditch liners.

Disadvantages of blankets include:

- Surface preparation required
- On slopes steeper than 2.5H:1V, blanket installers may need to be roped and harnessed for safety
- They cost at least \$4,000 to \$6,000 per acre installed.

Advantages of blankets include:

- Installation without mobilizing special equipment
- Installation by anyone with minimal training
- Installation in stages or phases as the project progresses

- Installers can hand place seed and fertilizer as they progress down the slope
- Installation in any weather
- There are numerous types of blankets that can be designed with various parameters in mind. Those parameters include: fiber blend, mesh strength, longevity, biodegradability, cost, and availability.

Design and Installation Specifications

- See Figure 3.2 and Attachments Section C, Detail 16.0 for typical orientation and installation of blankets used in channels and as slope protection. Note: These are typical only; all blankets must be installed per manufacturer's installation instructions.
- Installation is critical to the effectiveness of these products. If good ground contact is not achieved, runoff can concentrate under the product, resulting in significant erosion.
- **Installation of Blankets on Slopes:**
 - Complete final grade and track walk up and down the slope.
 - Install hydromulch with seed and fertilizer.
 - Dig a small trench, approximately 12-inches wide by 6-inches deep along the top of the slope.
 - Install the leading edge of the blanket into the small trench and staple approximately every 18-inches. NOTE: Staples are metal, U-shaped, and a minimum of 6-inches long. Longer staples are used in sandy soils. Biodegradable stakes are also available.
 - Roll the blanket slowly down the slope as installer walks backwards. NOTE: The blanket rests against the installer's legs. Staples are installed as the blanket is unrolled. It is critical that the proper staple pattern is used for the blanket being installed. The blanket is not to be allowed to roll down the slope on its own as this stretches the blanket making it impossible to maintain soil contact. In addition, no one is allowed to walk on the blanket after it is in place.
 - If the blanket is not long enough to cover the entire slope length, the trailing edge of the upper blanket should overlap the leading edge of the lower blanket and be stapled. On steeper slopes, this overlap should be installed in a small trench, stapled, and covered with soil.

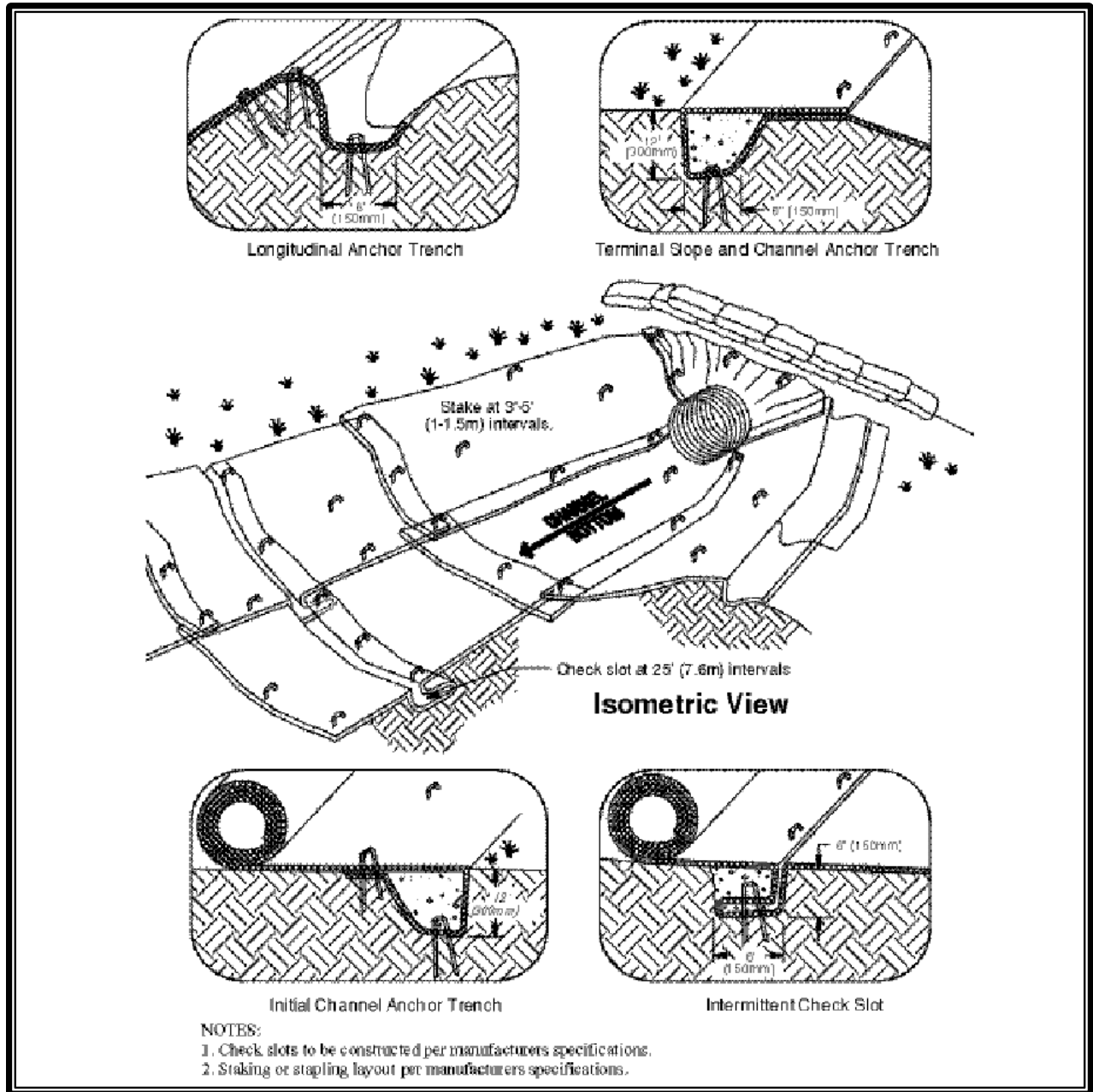


Figure 3.2. Channel Installation.

- With the variety of products available, it is impossible to cover all the details of appropriate use and installation. Therefore, it is critical that the design engineer consult the manufacturer's information and that a site visit takes place in order to ensure that the product specified is appropriate. Information is also available at WSDOT's web site.
- Use jute matting in conjunction with mulch (BMP C121: Mulching). Excelsior, woven straw blankets and coir (coconut fiber) blankets may be

installed without mulch. There are many other types of erosion control nets and blankets on the market that may be appropriate in certain circumstances.

- In general, most nets (e.g., jute matting) require mulch in order to prevent erosion because they have a fairly open structure. Blankets typically do not require mulch because they usually provide complete protection of the surface.
- Extremely steep, unstable, wet, or rocky slopes are often appropriate candidates for use of synthetic blankets, as are riverbanks, beaches and other high-energy environments. If synthetic blankets are used, the soil should be hydromulched first.
- One-hundred percent biodegradable blankets are available for use in sensitive areas. These organic blankets are usually held together with a paper or fiber mesh and stitching which may last up to a year.
- Most netting used with blankets is photodegradable, meaning they break down under sunlight (not UV stabilized). However, this process can take months or years even under bright sun. Once vegetation is established, sunlight does not reach the mesh. It is not uncommon to find non-degraded netting still in place several years after installation. This can be a problem if maintenance requires the use of mowers or ditch cleaning equipment. In addition, birds and small animals can become trapped in the netting.

Maintenance Standards

- Maintain good contact with the ground. Erosion must not occur beneath the net or blanket.
- Repair and staple any areas of the net or blanket that are damaged or not in close contact with the ground.
- Fix and protect eroded areas if erosion occurs due to poorly controlled drainage.