



Description and Purpose

Soil binding consists of application and maintenance of a soil stabilizer to exposed soil surfaces. Soil binders are materials applied to the soil surface to temporarily prevent water and wind induced erosion of exposed soils on construction sites.

Suitable Applications

Soil binders are typically applied to disturbed areas requiring temporary protection. Because soil binders, when used as a stand-alone practice, can often be incorporated into the soil, they are a good alternative to mulches in areas where grading activities will soon resume. Soil binders are commonly used in the following areas:

- Rough graded soils that will be inactive for a short period of time
- Soil stockpiles
- Temporary haul roads prior to placement of crushed rock
- Compacted soil road base
- Construction staging, materials storage, and layout areas

Limitations

- Soil binders are temporary in nature and may need reapplication.

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-6 Straw Mulch
- EC-7 Geotextiles and Mats
- EC-8 Wood Mulching



- Soil binders require a minimum curing time until fully effective, as prescribed by the manufacturer. Curing time may be 24 hours or longer. Soil binders may need reapplication after a storm event.
- Soil binders will generally experience spot failures during heavy rainfall events. If runoff penetrates the soil at the top of a slope treated with a soil binder, it is likely that the runoff will undercut the stabilized soil layer and discharge at a point further down slope.
- Plant-material-based soil binders do not generally hold up to pedestrian or vehicular traffic across treated areas as well as polymeric emulsion blends or cementitious-based binders.
- Soil binders may not sufficiently penetrate compacted soils.
- Some soil binders are soil texture specific in terms of their effectiveness. For example, polyacrylamides (PAMs) work very well on silt and clayey soils but their performance decreases dramatically in sandy soils.
- Some soil binders may not perform well with low relative humidity. Under rainy conditions, some agents may become slippery or leach out of the soil.
- Soil binders may not cure if low temperatures occur within 24 hours of application.
- The water quality impacts of some chemical soil binders are relatively unknown and some may have water quality impacts due to their chemical makeup.

Implementation

General Considerations

- Soil binders should conform to local municipality specifications and requirements.
- Site soil types will dictate appropriate soil binders to be used.
- A soil binder must be environmentally benign (non-toxic to plant and animal life), easy to apply, easy to maintain, economical, and should not stain paved or painted surfaces. Soil binders should not pollute stormwater when cured. Obtain a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) from the manufacturer to ensure non-toxicity.
- Stormwater runoff from PAM treated soils should pass through one of the following sediment control BMP prior to discharging to surface waters.
 - When the total drainage area is greater than or equal to 5 acres, PAM treated areas should drain to a sediment basin.
 - Areas less than 5 acres should drain to sediment control BMPs, such as a sediment trap, or a series of check dams. The total number of check dams used should be maximized to achieve the greatest amount of settlement of sediment prior to discharging from the site. Each check dam should be spaced evenly in the drainage channel through which stormwater flows are discharged off site.
- Performance of soil binders depends on temperature, humidity, and traffic across treated areas.

- Avoid over spray onto roads, sidewalks, drainage channels, existing vegetation, etc.
- Additional guidance on the comparison and selection of temporary slope stabilization methods is provided in Appendix F of the Handbook.

Selecting a Soil Binder

Properties of common soil binders used for erosion control are provided on Table 1 at the end of this Fact Sheet. Use Table 1 to select an appropriate soil binder. Refer to WE-1, Wind Erosion Control, for dust control soil binders.

Factors to consider when selecting a soil binder include the following:

- **Suitability to situation** - Consider where the soil binder will be applied, if it needs a high resistance to leaching or abrasion, and whether it needs to be compatible with any existing vegetation. Determine the length of time soil stabilization will be needed, and if the soil binder will be placed in an area where it will degrade rapidly. In general, slope steepness is not a discriminating factor for the listed soil binders.
- **Soil types and surface materials** - Fines and moisture content are key properties of surface materials. Consider a soil binder's ability to penetrate, likelihood of leaching, and ability to form a surface crust on the surface materials.
- **Frequency of application** - The frequency of application is related to the functional longevity of the binder, which can be affected by subgrade conditions, surface type, climate, and maintenance schedule.
- **Frequent applications could lead to high costs.** Application frequency may be minimized if the soil binder has good penetration, low evaporation, and good longevity. Consider also that frequent application will require frequent equipment clean up.

Plant-Material-Based (Short Lived, <6 months) Binders

Guar: Guar is a non-toxic, biodegradable, natural galactomannan-based hydrocolloid treated with dispersant agents for easy field mixing. It should be mixed with water at the rate of 11 to 15 lb per 1,000 gallons. Recommended minimum application rates are as follows:

Application Rates for Guar Soil Stabilizer

| | | | | | |
|--------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Slope (H:V): | Flat | 4:1 | 3:1 | 2:1 | 1:1 |
| lb/acre: | 40 | 45 | 50 | 60 | 70 |

Psyllium: Psyllium is composed of the finely ground muciloid coating of plantago seeds that is applied as a dry powder or in a wet slurry to the surface of the soil. It dries to form a firm but rewettable membrane that binds soil particles together, but permits germination and growth of seed. Psyllium requires 12 to 18 hours drying time. Application rates should be from 80 to 200 lb/acre, with enough water in solution to allow for a uniform slurry flow.

Starch: Starch is non-ionic, cold water soluble (pre-gelatinized) granular cornstarch. The material is mixed with water and applied at the rate of 150 lb/acre. Approximate drying time is 9 to 12 hours.

Plant-Material-Based (Long Lived, 6-12 months) Binders

Pitch and Rosin Emulsion: Generally, a non-ionic pitch and rosin emulsion has a minimum solids content of 48%. The rosin should be a minimum of 26% of the total solids content. The soil stabilizer should be non-corrosive, water dilutable emulsion that upon application cures to a water insoluble binding and cementing agent. For soil erosion control applications, the emulsion is diluted and should be applied as follows:

- For clayey soil: 5 parts water to 1 part emulsion
- For sandy soil: 10 parts water to 1 part emulsion

Application can be by water truck or hydraulic seeder with the emulsion and product mixture applied at the rate specified by the manufacturer.

Polymeric Emulsion Blend Binders

Acrylic Copolymers and Polymers: Polymeric soil stabilizers should consist of a liquid or solid polymer or copolymer with an acrylic base that contains a minimum of 55% solids. The polymeric compound should be handled and mixed in a manner that will not cause foaming or should contain an anti-foaming agent. The polymeric emulsion should not exceed its shelf life or expiration date; manufacturers should provide the expiration date. Polymeric soil stabilizer should be readily miscible in water, non-injurious to seed or animal life, non-flammable, should provide surface soil stabilization for various soil types without totally inhibiting water infiltration, and should not re-emulsify when cured. The applied compound typically requires 12 to 24 hours drying time. Liquid copolymer should be diluted at a rate of 10 parts water to 1 part polymer and the mixture applied to soil at a rate of 1,175 gallons/acre.

Liquid Polymers of Methacrylates and Acrylates: This material consists of a tackifier/sealer that is a liquid polymer of methacrylates and acrylates. It is an aqueous 100% acrylic emulsion blend of 40% solids by volume that is free from styrene, acetate, vinyl, ethoxylated surfactants or silicates. For soil stabilization applications, it is diluted with water in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations, and applied with a hydraulic seeder at the rate of 20 gallons/acre. Drying time is 12 to 18 hours after application.

Copolymers of Sodium Acrylates and Acrylamides: These materials are non-toxic, dry powders that are copolymers of sodium acrylate and acrylamide. They are mixed with water and applied to the soil surface for erosion control at rates that are determined by slope gradient:

| Slope Gradient (H:V) | lb/acre |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Flat to 5:1 | 3.0 – 5.0 |
| 5:1 to 3:1 | 5.0 – 10.0 |
| 2:1 to 1:1 | 10.0 – 20.0 |

Poly-Acrylamide (PAM) and Copolymer of Acrylamide: Linear copolymer polyacrylamide for use as a soil binder is packaged as a dry flowable solid, as a liquid. Refer to the manufacturer's recommendation for dilution and application rates as they vary based on liquid or dry form, site conditions and climate.

- Limitations specific to PAM are as follows:

- Do not use PAM on a slope that flows into a water body without passing through a sediment trap or sediment basin.
- The specific PAM copolymer formulation must be anionic. Cationic PAM should not be used in any application because of known aquatic toxicity problems. Only the highest drinking water grade PAM, certified for compliance with ANSI/NSF Standard 60 for drinking water treatment, should be used for soil applications.
- PAM designated for erosion and sediment control should be “water soluble” or “linear” or “non-cross linked”.
- PAM should not be used as a stand-alone BMP to protect against water-based erosion. When combined with mulch, its effectiveness increases dramatically.

Hydro-Colloid Polymers: Hydro-Colloid Polymers are various combinations of dry flowable poly-acrylamides, copolymers and hydro-colloid polymers that are mixed with water and applied to the soil surface at rates of 55 to 60 lb/acre. Drying times are 0 to 4 hours.

Cementitious-Based Binders

Gypsum: This is a formulated gypsum based product that readily mixes with water and mulch to form a thin protective crust on the soil surface. It is composed of high purity gypsum that is ground, calcined and processed into calcium sulfate hemihydrate with a minimum purity of 86%. It is mixed in a hydraulic seeder and applied at rates 4,000 to 12,000 lb/acre. Drying time is 4 to 8 hours.

Applying Soil Binders

After selecting an appropriate soil binder, the untreated soil surface must be prepared before applying the soil binder. The untreated soil surface must contain sufficient moisture to assist the agent in achieving uniform distribution. In general, the following steps should be followed:

- Follow manufacturer’s written recommendations for application rates, pre-wetting of application area, and cleaning of equipment after use.
- Prior to application, roughen embankment and fill areas.
- Consider the drying time for the selected soil binder and apply with sufficient time before anticipated rainfall. Soil binders should not be applied during or immediately before rainfall.
- Avoid over spray onto roads, sidewalks, drainage channels, sound walls, existing vegetation, etc.
- Soil binders should not be applied to frozen soil, areas with standing water, under freezing or rainy conditions, or when the temperature is below 40°F during the curing period.
- More than one treatment is often necessary, although the second treatment may be diluted or have a lower application rate.
- Generally, soil binders require a minimum curing time of 24 hours before they are fully effective. Refer to manufacturer's instructions for specific cure time.

- For liquid agents:
 - Crown or slope ground to avoid ponding.
 - Uniformly pre-wet ground at 0.03 to 0.3 gal/yd² or according to manufacturer's recommendations.
 - Apply solution under pressure. Overlap solution 6 to 12 in.
 - Allow treated area to cure for the time recommended by the manufacturer; typically at least 24 hours.
 - Apply second treatment before first treatment becomes ineffective, using 50% application rate.
 - In low humidities, reactivate chemicals by re-wetting with water at 0.1 to 0.2 gal/yd².

Costs

Costs vary according to the soil stabilizer selected for implementation. The following are approximate installed costs:

| Soil Binder | Cost per Acre (2000) ¹ | Estimated Cost per Acre (2009) ² |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Plant-Material-Based (Short Lived) Binders | \$700-\$900 | \$770-\$990 |
| Plant-Material-Based (Long Lived) Binders | \$1,200-\$1,500 | \$1,320-\$1,650 |
| Polymeric Emulsion Blend Binders | \$700 -\$1,500 | \$770-\$1,650 |
| Cementitious-Based Binders | \$800-\$1,200 | \$880-\$1,350 |

1. Source: Erosion Control Pilot Study Report, Caltrans, June 2000.

2. 2009 costs reflect a 10% escalation over year 2000 costs. Escalation based on informal survey of industry trends. Note: Expected cost increase is offset by competitive economic conditions.

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.
- Reapply the selected soil binder as needed to maintain effectiveness.

| Evaluation Criteria | Binder Type | | | |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| | Plant Material Based (Short Lived) | Plant Material Based (Long Lived) | Polymeric Emulsion Blends | Cementitious-Based Binders |
| Relative Cost | Low | Moderate to High | Low to High | Low to Moderate |
| Resistance to Leaching | High | High | Low to Moderate | Moderate |
| Resistance to Abrasion | Moderate | Low | Moderate to High | Moderate to High |
| Longevity | Short to Medium | Medium | Medium to Long | Medium |
| Minimum Curing Time before Rain | 9 to 18 hours | 19 to 24 hours | 0 to 24 hours | 4 to 8 hours |
| Compatibility with Existing Vegetation | Good | Poor | Poor | Poor |
| Mode of Degradation | Biodegradable | Biodegradable | Photodegradable/ Chemically Degradable | Photodegradable/ Chemically Degradable |
| Labor Intensive | No | No | No | No |
| Specialized Application Equipment | Water Truck or Hydraulic Mulcher | Water Truck or Hydraulic Mulcher | Water Truck or Hydraulic Mulcher | Water Truck or Hydraulic Mulcher |
| Liquid/Powder | Powder | Liquid | Liquid/Powder | Powder |
| Surface Crusting | Yes, but dissolves on rewetting | Yes | Yes, but dissolves on rewetting | Yes |
| Clean Up | Water | Water | Water | Water |
| Erosion Control Application Rate | Varies ⁽¹⁾ | Varies ⁽¹⁾ | Varies ⁽¹⁾ | 4,000 to 12,000 lbs/acre |

(1) See Implementation for specific rates.

References

Erosion Control Pilot Study Report, State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), June 2000.

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.

Stormwater Quality Handbooks Construction Site Best Management Practices (BMPs) Manual, State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), March 2003.

Guidance Document: Soil Stabilization for Temporary Slopes, State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), November 1999.

Stormwater Management for Construction Activities, Developing Pollution Prevention Plans and Best Management Practices, EPA 832-R-92005; USEPA, April 1992.