Compost Socks and Berms SE-13

Description and Purpose

Compost socks and berms act as three-dimensional biodegradable filtering structures to intercept runoff where sheet flow occurs and are generally placed at the site perimeter or at intervals on sloped areas. Compost socks are generally a mesh sock containing compost and a compost berm is a dike of compost, trapezoidal in cross section. When employed to intercept sheet flow, both BMPs are placed perpendicular to the flow of runoff, allowing filtered runoff to pass through the compost and retaining sediment (and potentially other pollutants). A compost sock can be assembled on site by filling a mesh sock (e.g. with a pneumatic blower). The compost berm should be constructed using a backhoe or equivalent and/or a pneumatic delivery (blower) system and should be properly compacted. Compost socks and berms act as filters, reduce runoff velocities, and in some cases, aid in establishing vegetation.

Compost is organic, biodegradable, and renewable. Compost provides soil structure that allows water to infiltrate the compost medium which helps prevent rill erosion and the retained moisture promotes seed germination and vegetation growth, in addition to providing organic matter and nutrients important for fostering vegetation. Compost improves soil quality and productivity, as well as erosion and sediment control.

Categories

EC	Erosion Control	☒
SE	Sediment Control	☑
TC	Tracking Control	
WE	Wind Erosion Control	
NS	Non-Stormwater Management Control	
WM	Waste Management and Materials Pollution Control	

Legend:
☑ **Primary Category**
☒ **Secondary Category**

Targeted Constituents

Sediment	☑
Nutrients	
Trash	
Metals	☒
Bacteria	☒
Oil and Grease	☒
Organics	

Potential Alternatives

SE-1 Silt Fence

SE-5 Fiber Roll

SE-6 Gravel Bag Berm

SE-8 Sandbag Barrier

SE-14 Biofilter Bags

The compost of the compost sock or berm can be selected that targets site specific objectives in capturing sediment and other pollutants, supporting vegetation, or additional erosion control.

Compost is typically derived from combinations of feedstocks, biosolids, leaf and yard trimmings, manure, wood, or mixed solid waste. Many types of compost are products of municipal recycle or "Greenwaste" programs. Compost is organic and biodegradable and can be left onsite. There are many types of compost with a variety of properties with specific functions, and accordingly compost selection is an important design consideration in the application of this type of erosion and sediment control.

Suitable Applications

- Along the toe, top, face, and at grade breaks of exposed and erodible slopes to shorten slope length and spread runoff as sheet flow (compost berms should only be used at the top of slopes or on slopes 4:1 (H:V) or flatter, all other slope applications should use compost socks)
- Along the perimeter of a project
- As check dams in unlined ditches (compost socks only)
- Down-slope of exposed soil areas
- At operational storm drains as a form of inlet protection (compost socks only)
- Around temporary stockpiles

Compost socks and berms do not require special trenching or BMP removal compared to other sediment control methods (e.g. silt fence or fiber rolls). Compost socks and berms can remain in place after earth disturbing activities are completed or the compost components can be spread over the site providing nutrients for plant growth and augmenting soil structure. BMPs that remain in place are particularly advantageous below embankments, especially adjacent streams, by limiting re-entry and the disturbance to sensitive areas.

Compost can be pre-seeded prior to application (recommended by the EPA for construction site stormwater runoff control and required for compost socks) or seeded after installation (for compost berms only). The compost medium can also remove pollutants in stormwater including heavy metals; oil and grease; and hydrocarbons.

Limitations

- Compost can potentially leach nutrients (dissolved phosphorus and nitrogen) into runoff and potentially impact water quality. Compost should not be used directly upstream from nutrient impaired waterbodies (Adams et. al, 2008).
- Compost may also contain other undesirable constituents that are detrimental to water quality. Compost should be obtained from a supplier certified by the California Integrated Waste Management Board or compost should otherwise meet the environmental health standards of Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Division 7, Chapter 3.1, Article 7. Carefully consider the qualifications and experience of any compost producer/supplier.

- Application by hand is more time intensive and potentially costly. Using a pneumatic blower truck is the recommended cost effective method of assembly.
- Compost socks and berms should not be employed at the base of slopes greater than 2:1 (H:V). They can be employed with other erosion control methods for steeper slopes.
- Difficult to move once saturated.
- Compost berms should not be applied in areas of concentrated flows.
- Compost socks and berms are easy to fix; however, they are susceptible to damage by frequent traffic. Compost socks can be used around heavy machinery, but regular disturbance decreases sock performance.

Implementation

Compost Materials

- California Compost Regulations (Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Division 7, Chapter 3.1, Article 7, Section 17868.3) define and require a quality of compost for application. Compost should comply with all physical and chemical requirements. Specific requirements are provided in **Table 1**, taken from Caltrans Standard Special Provision 10-1 (SSP 10-1), Erosion Control (Compost Blanket).
- The compost producer should be fully permitted as specified under the California Integrated Waste Management Board, Local Enforcement Agencies and any other State and Local Agencies that regulate Solid Waste Facilities. If exempt from State permitting requirements, the composting facility should certify that it follows guidelines and procedures for production of compost meeting the environmental health standards of Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Division 7, Chapter 3.1, Article 7.
- The compost producer should be a participant in United States Composting Council's Seal of Testing Assurance program.
- Compost medium parameter specifications for compost socks and berms have been developed to assist in compost selection, such as those provided by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO).
- Particle size is important parameter for selecting compost. Well consolidated coarser grades of compost (e.g. small and large pieces) perform better for filtration objectives, while finer grades better support vegetation. Particle size of the compost should be selected based on site conditions, such as expected precipitation, and filtration goals and / or long term plant nutrients.
- Compost moisture should be considered for composition quality and application purposes. A range of 30-50% is typical. Compost that is too dry is hard to apply and compost that is too wet is more difficult (and more expensive) to transport. For arid or semi-arid areas, or for application during the dry season, use compost with greater moisture content than areas with wetter climates. For wetter or more humid climates or for application during the wet season, drier composts can be used as the compost will absorb moisture from the ambient air.

- If vegetation establishment is a desired function of the compost, a compost sample should be inspected by a qualified individual. Vegetation has different nutrient and moisture needs.
- Organic content of the compost is also important and should range from 30 to 65% depending on site conditions.
- Compost should not be derived from mixed municipal solid waste and should be reasonably free of visible contaminates.
- Compost should not contain paint, petroleum products, pesticides or any other chemical residues harmful to animal life or plant growth. Metal concentrations in compost should not exceed the maximum metal concentrations listed under Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Division 7, Chapter 3.1, Section 17868.2.
- Compost should not possess objectionable odors.
- Compost should be weed free.

Table 1. Physical/Chemical Requirements of Compost
Reference - Caltrans SSP-10 Erosion Control Blanket (Compost)

Property	Test Method	Requirement
pH	*TMECC 04.11-A Elastometric pH 1:5 Slurry Method pH Units	6.0–8.0
Soluble Salts	TMECC 04.10-A Electrical Conductivity 1:5 Slurry Method dS/m (mmhos/cm)	0-10.0
Moisture Content	TMECC 03.09-A Total Solids & Moisture at 70+/- 5 deg C % Wet Weight Basis	30-60
Organic Matter Content	TMECC 05.07-A Loss-On-Ignition Organic Matter Method (LOI) % Dry Weight Basis	30–65
Maturity	TMECC 05.05-A Germination and Vigor Seed Emergence Seedling Vigor % Relative to Positive Control	 80 or Above 80 or Above
Stability	TMECC 05.08-B Carbon Dioxide Evolution Rate mg CO_2-C/g OM per day	8 or below
Particle Size	TMECC 02.02-B Sample Sieving for Aggregate Size Classification % Dry Weight Basis	100% Passing, 3 inch 90-100% Passing, 1 inch 65-100% Passing, 3/4 inch 0 - 75% Passing, 1/4 inch Maximum length 6 inches
Pathogen	TMECC 07.01-B Fecal Coliform Bacteria < 1000 MPN/gram dry wt.	Pass
Pathogen	TMECC 07.01-B Salmonella < 3 MPN/4 grams dry wt.	Pass
Physical Contaminants	TMECC 02.02-C Man Made Inert Removal and Classification: Plastic, Glass and Metal % > 4mm fraction	Combined Total: < 1.0
Physical Contaminants	TMECC 02.02-C Man Made Inert Removal and Classification: Sharps (Sewing needles, straight pins and hypodermic needles) % > 4mm fraction	None Detected

*TMECC refers to "Test Methods for the Examination of Composting and Compost," published by the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Compost Council (USCC).

Installation

- Prior to application, prepare locations for socks and berms by removing brush and thick vegetation. The compost of the sock and/or berm should be allowed to come in full contact with the ground surface.

- Select method to apply the compost sock or berm. A pneumatic blower is most cost effective and most adaptive in applying compost to steep, rough terrain, and hard to reach locations.

- The compost of the berm should be distributed evenly to the surface, compacted, and shaped trapezoidal in cross section. Berm design is generally consists of a base two times the height. AASHTO specification MP 9-03 provides compost berm dimensions based on anticipated

site precipitation (AASHTO, 2003 and USEPA, 2009). State agencies, such as Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) have developed berm dimension based on slope steepness and length (ODEQ, 2004).

- Compost socks can be assembled on site by filling mesh socks with the selected compost. Mesh socks can be tied at one end, filled, and then tied at the other end. The ends of socks can be interlocked until the desired length is achieved. The sock diameter is a function of slope steepness and length. Again, ASSHTO provides specifications for various parameters. Compost socks range from 8" to 18", but are typically 12" to 18" in diameter.

- Compost socks are typically placed in contours perpendicular to sheet flow. They can also be placed in V formation on a slope. Compost socks need to be anchored, typically stakes, through the center of the sock. To prevent water flowing around them, the ends of compost socks should be placed upslope.

- Locate compost socks and berms on level contours spaced as follows:

  - Slope inclination of 4:1 (H:V) or flatter: Socks and/or berms should be placed at a maximum interval of 20 ft.

  - Slope inclination between 4:1 and 2:1 (H:V): Socks should be placed at a maximum interval of 15 ft. (a closer spacing is more effective).

  - Slope inclination 2:1 (H:V) or greater: Socks should be placed at a maximum interval of 10 ft. (a closer spacing is more effective).

- Place perimeter socks and berms using a j-hook installation. Use of vegetation will also provide additional anchoring.

- Compost socks and berms can be placed around the perimeter of an affected area, like a silt fence, if the area is flat or on a contour. Do not place these socks and berms where ponded water could become an issue.

- If used at the toe of slopes, the compost sock or berm should at a minimum of 5 to 10 feet away.

- Use additional anchoring and erosion control BMPs in conjunction of the compost socks and berms as needed.

- Consider using compost berms or socks as necessary at the top and/or bottom of the slope for additional erosion control performance.

- Compost socks and berms can also be effective over rocky and frozen ground if installed properly.

- It is recommended that the drainage areas of these compost BMPs do not exceed 0.25 acre per 100 feet placement interval and runoff does not exceed 1 cubic foot per second.

Costs

Recently obtained vendor costs indicated $3.50 per linear foot for compost berm application and $2.00 per linear foot for 8" socks and $2.50 per linear foot for 12"socks. Costs do not include final compost sock or berm functions at the end of construction activities, including spreading or removal, if required. ODEQ estimates that compost berms cost 30 percent less than silt fences to install.

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.

- Once damage is identified, mend or reapply the sock or berm as needed. Washed out areas should be replaced. If the sock or berm height is breached during a storm, an additional sock can be stacked to increase the sock height and similarly the berm dimensions can be increased, as applicable. An additional sock or berm may be installed upslope, as needed. It may be necessary to apply an additional type of stormwater BMP, such as a compost blanket.

- Sediment contained by the sock or berm should be removed prior reaching 1/3 of the exposed height of the BMP. The sediment can be stabilized with the compost sock or berm with vegetation at the end of construction activities.

- Care should be exercised to minimize the damage to protected areas while making repairs, as any area damaged will require reapplication of BMPs.

- Limit traffic to minimize damage to BMPs or impede vegetation establishment.

References

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