



Description and Purpose

A gravel bag berm is a series of gravel-filled bags placed on a level contour to intercept sheet flows. Gravel bags pond sheet flow runoff, allowing sediment to settle out, and release runoff slowly as sheet flows, preventing erosion.

Suitable Applications

Gravel bag berms may be suitable:

- As a linear sediment control measure:
 - Below the toe of slopes and erodible slopes
 - As sediment traps at culvert/pipe outlets
 - Below other small cleared areas
 - Along the perimeter of a site
 - Down slope of exposed soil areas
 - Around temporary stockpiles and spoil areas
 - Parallel to a roadway to keep sediment off paved areas
 - Along streams and channels
- As linear erosion control measure:

Objectives

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

Legend:

- ☒ Primary Objective
- ☒ Secondary Objective

Targeted Constituents

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

Potential Alternatives

- SE-1 Silt Fence
- SE-5 Fiber Roll
- SE-8 Sandbag Barrier
- SE-9 Straw Bale Barrier



- Along the face and at grade breaks of exposed and erodible slopes to shorten slope length and spread runoff as sheet flow

At the top of slopes to divert runoff away from disturbed slopes

- As check dams across mildly sloped construction roads

Limitations

- Gravel berms may be difficult to remove.
- Removal problems limit their usefulness in landscaped areas.
- Gravel bag berm may not be appropriate for drainage areas greater than 5 acres.
- Runoff will pond upstream of the filter, possibly causing flooding if sufficient space does not exist.
- Degraded gravel bags may rupture when removed, spilling contents.
- Installation can be labor intensive.
- Berms may have limited durability for long-term projects.
- When used to detain concentrated flows, maintenance requirements increase.

Implementation

General

A gravel bag berm consists of a row of open graded gravel-filled bags placed on a level contour. When appropriately placed, a gravel bag berm intercepts and slows sheet flow runoff, causing temporary ponding. The temporary ponding provides quiescent conditions allowing sediment to settle. The open graded gravel in the bags is porous, which allows the ponded runoff to flow slowly through the bags, releasing the runoff as sheet flows. Gravel bag berms also interrupt the slope length and thereby reduce erosion by reducing the tendency of sheet flows to concentrate into rivulets, which erode rills, and ultimately gullies, into disturbed, sloped soils. Gravel bag berms are similar to sand bag barriers, but are more porous.

Design and Layout

- Locate gravel bag berms on level contours.
 - Slopes between 20:1 and 2:1 (H:V): Gravel bags should be placed at a maximum interval of 50 ft (a closer spacing is more effective), with the first row near the slope toe.
 - Slopes 2:1 (H:V) or steeper: Gravel bags should be placed at a maximum interval of 25 ft (a closer spacing is more effective), with the first row placed the slope toe.
- Turn the ends of the gravel bag barriers up slope to prevent runoff from going around the berm.
- Allow sufficient space up slope from the gravel bag berm to allow ponding, and to provide room for sediment storage.

- For installation near the toe of the slope, consider moving the gravel bag barriers away from the slope toe to facilitate cleaning. To prevent flows behind the barrier, bags can be placed perpendicular to a berm to serve as cross barriers.
- Drainage area should not exceed 5 acres.
- In Non-Traffic Areas:
 - Height = 18 in. maximum
 - Top width = 24 in. minimum for three or more layer construction
 - Top width = 12 in. minimum for one or two layer construction
 - Side slopes = 2:1 or flatter
- In Construction Traffic Areas:
 - Height = 12 in. maximum
 - Top width = 24 in. minimum for three or more layer construction.
 - Top width = 12 in. minimum for one or two layer construction.
 - Side slopes = 2:1 or flatter.
- Butt ends of bags tightly
- On multiple row, or multiple layer construction, overlap butt joints of adjacent row and row beneath.
- Use a pyramid approach when stacking bags.

Materials

- **Bag Material:** Bags should be woven polypropylene, polyethylene or polyamide fabric or burlap, minimum unit weight of 4 ounces/yd², Mullen burst strength exceeding 300 lb/in² in conformance with the requirements in ASTM designation D3786, and ultraviolet stability exceeding 70% in conformance with the requirements in ASTM designation D4355.
- **Bag Size:** Each gravel-filled bag should have a length of 18 in., width of 12 in., thickness of 3 in., and mass of approximately 33 lbs. Bag dimensions are nominal, and may vary based on locally available materials.
- **Fill Material:** Fill material should be 0.5 to 1 in. Class 2 aggregate base, clean and free from clay, organic matter, and other deleterious material, or other suitable open graded, non-cohesive, porous gravel.

Costs

Gravel filter: Expensive, since off-site materials, hand construction, and demolition/removal are usually required. Material costs for gravel bags are average of \$2.50 per empty gravel bag. Gravel costs range from \$20-\$35 per yd³.

Inspection and Maintenance

- Inspect BMPs prior to forecast rain, daily during extended rain events, after rain events, weekly during the rainy season, and at two-week intervals during the non-rainy season.
- Gravel bags exposed to sunlight will need to be replaced every two to three months due to degrading of the bags.
- Reshape or replace gravel bags as needed.
- Repair washouts or other damage as needed.
- Sediment that accumulates in the BMP must be periodically removed in order to maintain BMP effectiveness. Sediment should be removed when the sediment accumulation reaches one-third of the barrier height. Sediment removed during maintenance may be incorporated into earthwork on the site or disposed at an appropriate location.
- Remove gravel bag berms when no longer needed. Remove sediment accumulation and clean, re-grade, and stabilize the area. Removed sediment should be incorporated in the project or disposed of.

References

Handbook of Steel Drainage and Highway Construction, American Iron and Steel Institute, 1983.

Stormwater Quality Handbooks - Construction Site Best Management Practices (BMPs) Manual, State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), November 2000.

Stormwater Pollution Plan Handbook, First Edition, State of California, Department of Transportation Division of New Technology, Materials and Research, October 1992.