



## Description and Purpose

Straw mulch consists of placing a uniform layer of straw and incorporating it into the soil with a studded roller or anchoring it with a tackifier 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 soil disturbed areas requiring temporary protection until permanent stabilization is established. Straw mulch is typically used for erosion control on disturbed areas until soils can be prepared for permanent vegetation. Straw mulch is also used in combination with temporary and/or permanent seeding strategies to enhance plant establishment.

## 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.
- There is a potential for introduction of weed seed and unwanted plant material.
- When straw blowers are used to apply straw mulch, the treatment areas must be within 150 ft of a road or surface capable of supporting trucks.
- Straw mulch applied by hand is more time intensive and potentially costly.

## Objectives

EC	Erosion Control	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
SE	Sediment Control	
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

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



- 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.

**Implementation**

- Straw shall be derived from wheat, rice, or barley. Where required by the plans, specifications, permits, or environmental documents, native grass straw shall be used.
- A tackifier is the preferred method for anchoring 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 shall only be used where other methods are impractical.
- Avoid placing straw onto roads, sidewalks, drainage channels, sound walls, existing vegetation, etc.
- Straw mulch with tackifier shall not be applied during or immediately before rainfall.
- In San Diego, use of straw near wood framed home construction has been frowned on by the Fire Marshall.

**Application Procedures**

- Apply straw at a minimum rate of 4,000 lb/acre, either by machine or by hand distribution.
- Roughen embankments and fill rills before placing the straw mulch by rolling with a crimping or punching type roller or by track walking.
- Evenly distribute straw mulch on the soil surface.
- Anchor straw mulch to the soil surface by “punching” it into the soil mechanically (incorporating). Alternatively, use a tackifier to adhere straw fibers.
- Methods for holding the straw mulch in place depend upon the slope steepness, accessibility, soil conditions, and longevity.
  - On 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 coultter, known commercially as a “crimper”.
  - On small areas and/or steep slopes, straw can also be held in place using plastic netting or jute. The netting shall be held in place using 11 gauge wire staples, geotextile pins or wooden stakes as described in EC-7, Geotextiles and Mats.
  - A tackifier acts to glue the straw fibers together and to the soil surface. The tackifier shall 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.

## Costs

Average annual cost for installation and maintenance (3-4 months useful life) is \$2,500 per acre. Application by hand is more time intensive and potentially costly.

## 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.
- 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.
- 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

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).

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.

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

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.