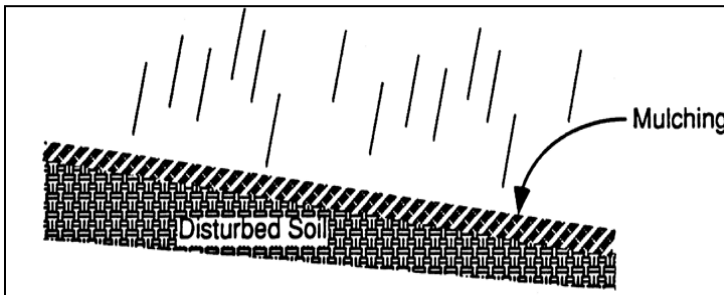


## 2.5 Mulching

Erosion Control



**Description:** Mulching is the application of a uniform layer of organic material over barren areas to reduce the effects of erosion from rainfall. Types of mulch include compost mixtures, straw, wood chips, bark, or other fibers. Commercialized surface treatments that combine straw or other mulch material with organic or inorganic soil binding systems are also available and are particularly useful on steep slopes.

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS

**DESIGN CRITERIA:**

- Specify even, uniform application
- Thickness of 1 to 2 inches, depending on application
- Application criteria specific to type of mulch
- Anchor mulch on slopes of 3:1 to 1.5:1
- Do not use mulch on slopes steeper than 1.5:1

**ADVANTAGES / BENEFITS:**

- Provides immediate stabilization of bare areas
- May be used with seeding for final stabilization
- Decreases soil moisture loss
- Decreases velocity of sheet flow
- Reduces volume of sediment-laden flow

**DISADVANTAGES / LIMITATIONS:**

- Subject to removal by wind or water
- Results in lower soil temperature, which may yield longer seed germination periods
- Should not be applied within the ordinary high-water mark of natural surface waters or within the design flow depth of constructed ditches and channels

**MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS:**

- Inspect regularly
- Replace regularly in high traffic areas to maintain uniform thickness
- Maintain a stockpile of excess mulch at the site to repair problem spots

### TARGETED POLLUTANTS

- Sediment
- Nutrients & Toxic Materials
- Oil & Grease
- Floatable Materials
- Other Construction Wastes

### APPLICATIONS

**Perimeter Control**

**Slope Protection**

**Sediment Barrier**

**Channel Protection**

**Temporary Stabilization**

**Final Stabilization**

**Waste Management**

**Housekeeping Practices**

**Fe=0.75-0.90**

*(Depends on coverage)*

### IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

- Capital Costs
- Maintenance
- Training
- Suitability for Slopes > 5%

**Other Considerations:**

- *Availability of materials for mulch*
- *Application depends on slope*

### 2.5.1 Primary Use

Mulch may be used by itself to temporarily stabilize bare areas or with seed to establish final stabilization of bare areas. Mulch protects the soil from erosion and moisture loss by lessening the effects of wind, water, and sunlight. It also decreases the velocity of sheet flow, thereby reducing the volume of sediment-laden water flow leaving the mulched area.

### 2.5.2 Applications

Mulch may be applied on most areas disturbed by construction that require surface protection including:

- Freshly seeded or planted areas;
- Disturbed areas at risk of erosion due to the time period being unsuitable for growing vegetation;
- Disturbed areas that are not conducive to vegetation for temporary stabilization; or
- Steep slopes of 3:1 to 1.5:1, provided the mulch is anchored to the soil by use of soil stabilizers, netting, or crimping.

Mulch is frequently applied with seeding for vegetation. In these cases, refer to [Section 2.9 Vegetation](#) for related criteria that may affect mulching.

Mulch may also be applied with commercially available polymers for soil surface treatment to bind the mulch with the soil. This method is particularly useful on steep slopes. Related criteria are available in [Section 2.7 Soil Surface Treatments](#).

### 2.5.3 Design Criteria

#### General

- Specific design information is required for the use of this control. The designer shall specify the type of mulch to be used, the application rate and/or thickness, and the type of anchoring (if applicable) based on site conditions.
- Choice of mulch depends largely on slope and soil type, in addition to availability of materials.
- Netting, adhesive polymers, or other methods of anchoring the mulch are required on slopes of 3:1 to 1.5:1. Do not use mulch on slopes steeper than 1.5:1.
- Mulch should be applied in an even and uniform manner where concentrated water flow is negligible. Do not apply mulch within the ordinary high-water mark of natural surface waters or within the design flow depth of constructed ditches and channels.
- Hay should not be used as mulch.
- Organic mulches may be distributed by hand or by mechanical means, provided a uniform thickness is achieved.
- When mulch is used with vegetation for final stabilization, fertilization and soil treatment for vegetation establishment should be done prior to placement of mulch, with the exception of hydroseeding or when seed is distributed following straw mulch spread during winter months.
- Table 2.1 on the following page contains a summary of mulch types and general guidelines.

<b>Mulch Material</b>	<b>Quality Standards</b>	<b>Application Rates</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Straw	Air-dried, free of mold and not rotten.  Certified Weed Free.	1.5 to 2 tons per acre	Cost-effective when applied with adequate thickness.  Straw must be held in place by crimping, netting, or soil stabilizer.
Chipped Site Vegetation	Should include gradation from fine to coarse to promote interlocking properties.  Must be free of waste materials such as plastic bags, metal debris, etc.	10 to 12 tons per acre	Cost-effective method to dispose of vegetative debris from site.  Best application is for temporary stabilization where construction will resume.  Use cautiously on areas where vegetation will be established, as wood chips will deplete soil nitrogen.
Erosion Control Compost (Wood Chip and Compost Mixture)	Shall meet the Physical Requirements in Table 1 of TxDOT Special Specification 1001.	Approx. 10 tons per acre	Special caution is advised regarding the source and composition of wood mulches.  Ensure compost is free of herbicides.  Ensure wood chips are from unpainted and untreated wood.
Hydraulic Mulch	Must not contain sawdust, cardboard, paper, paper byproducts, plastics, or synthetics.  No petroleum-based tackifiers.	Follow the manufacturer's recommendations.  Application rate increases with slope steepness.	May be particularly effective on slopes steeper than 3:1.  Ensure wood fibers are from unpainted and untreated wood.

## Straw Mulch

- Straw mulch shall be free of weed and grass seed.
- Straw mulch shall be air-dried, free of mold, and not rotten.
- Straw fibers shall be a minimum of 4 inches and a maximum of 8 inches in length.
- Straw mulch must be anchored by using a tractor-drawn crimper to punch into the soil, by placing degradable netting above the mulch, or by application of a soil stabilizer (*Section 2.7 Soil Surface Treatments*).

## Chipped Site Vegetation

- Chipped site vegetation is suitable mulch for temporary stabilization before construction will resume in an area of the construction site.
- Ensure the cleared vegetation is free of trash, litter, and debris prior to chipping.

- Chipped pieces shall be a minimum of 2 inches and a maximum of 6 inches in length.
- Chipped woody vegetation that is greater than 50% wood chips by volume may result in mulch that depletes nitrogen in the soil. It is useful as mulch for temporary stabilization where construction activity will resume and result in removal of the mulch. However, it should be used with care on areas where vegetation will be established for final stabilization.
- Chipped vegetation that is greater than 50 percent wood chips by volume may require treatment with a nitrogen fertilizer when used for mulch with seeding.
- Chipped vegetation that includes green matter will include seeds. It should not be used on areas that have specific landscaping requirements.

### **Erosion Control Compost (Wood Chip and Compost Mixture)**

- Wood chip and compost mixture used for mulch shall meet the criteria for Erosion Control Compost in TxDOT Special Specification 1001.
- Wood chips for the mixture shall be less than or equal to 5 inches in length with 95 percent passing a 2 inch screen and less than 30 percent passing a 1 inch screen. Mulch should not contain chipped manufactured boards or chemically treated wood such as particleboard, railroad ties, or similar treated wood.
- Compost for the mixture shall meet the Physical Requirements specified in Table 1 of 2004 TxDOT Special Specification 1001, Compost. It must be free of herbicides and other chemicals.
- Mixing of the Erosion Control Compost into the soil surface is allowed when vegetation is established for final stabilization, except for drill seeding, in which case it is best to leave the mulch as an undisturbed top layer.

### **Hydraulic Mulch (Including Bonded Fiber Matrix)**

- Hydraulic mulch shall consist of a mixture of shredded wood fiber and a stabilizing binder. The mulch must not contain sawdust, cardboard, paper or paper byproducts.
- Shredded wood fiber shall be long strand, whole wood fibers that are:
  - Minimum of 25 percent of fibers 3/8 inch long;
  - Minimum of 50 percent held on a No. 25 sieve;
  - Free from paint, printing ink, varnish, petroleum products, seed germination inhibitors; and
  - Free from synthetic or plastic materials.
- Mulch binders may be organic or inorganic polymers. Asphaltic emulsions and other petroleum-based tackifiers shall not be used.
- The stabilizing emulsion must be nonflammable, non-toxic to aquatic organisms, and free from growth or germination inhibiting factors.
- Areas hydraulically mulched shall be protected from all traffic, including foot traffic, a minimum of 24 hours to allow the mulch to dry and cure. Depending on the mulch, up to 48 hours of protection may be required. Always follow manufacturer's recommendations.
- Hydraulic mulch provides limited to no protection until cured. Do not apply when rain is forecast within the next 24 hours.
- Hydraulic mulch may be particularly effective on slopes steeper than 3:1.

## **2.5.4 Design Guidance and Specifications**

Specifications for construction of this item may be found in the Standard Specifications for Public Works Construction – North Central Texas Council of Governments, Section 201.16 Mulching. Specifications for

compost may be found in Standard Specifications for Construction and Maintenance of Highways, Streets and Bridges (TxDOT 2004) Item 161.

### *2.5.5 Inspection and Maintenance Requirements*

Mulched areas should be inspected regularly (at least as often as required by the TPDES Construction General Permit) for thin or bare spots caused by natural decomposition or weather related events. Mulch in high traffic areas should be replaced on a regular basis to maintain uniform protection. Excess mulch should be brought to the site and stockpiled for use during the maintenance period to dress problem spots.