

**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT**  
**WATER MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATION**  
**OPERATIONAL POLICY**

SUBJECT: Landscape Plantings on Dams

DIVISION: Dam Safety Division

POLICY NO.: 93-2

EFFECTIVE DATE: September 1, 1993

**I. PURPOSE**

The Dam Safety Division has received requests for aesthetic plantings on dams. This policy establishes criteria to evaluate and approve certain plantings.

**II. BACKGROUND**

The goal of a good stand of grass is to protect the embankment from erosion and to allow the dam to be inspected. Trees have been shown to develop root systems which can lead to seepage paths or they may blow over in a storm and reduce freeboard by removing a portion of the embankment. Trees also make it difficult to inspect a dam and they reduce available water and sunlight, which inhibits the growth of grass.

**III. DETAILS OF THE POLICY**

Landscape plantings on dams must comply with the following:

1. They do not develop woody roots;
2. They develop a root mat system equivalent to that of grass to provide erosion protection;
3. They can be easily mowed at least twice a year, and
4. They provide uniform ground coverage.

Proposed plantings that obscure the embankment, encourage animal burrowing, prohibit proper maintenance and allow tree growth or that do not provide erosion protection equal to that of grass should not be approved.

The reviewer and the owner must keep in mind that these structures are dams intended to impound water. Impounding water is inherently a "dangerous activity" and decisions made regarding dams must hold public safety at the highest priority. Landscaping and tree plantings can be accomplished at other locations.