Fact Sheet
Stabilization of Disturbed Land during Construction Activities

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 26.17.01 was promulgated to protect valued natural resources during land development and construction activities. An essential tool in preventing sediment from polluting local streams and the Chesapeake Bay is the stabilization of disturbed earth. Soil erosion and sediment control requirements are enforced at both the local and State levels.

Erosion and Sediment Control Plans

Erosion and sediment control plans are required for grading activity that disturbs 5,000 square feet or more of land area or 100 cubic yards or more of earth. As defined in Maryland regulations, grading is an activity that causes the disturbance of the earth. This includes but is not limited to any excavating, filling, stockpiling of earth materials, grubbing, or root mat or top soil disturbance. Maryland regulations specify what information is required on plans, including details of temporary and permanent stabilization.

Stabilization Requirements

Stabilization practices are used to promote the establishment of vegetation on exposed soil. When soil is stabilized with vegetation, the soil is less likely to erode and more likely to allow infiltration of rainfall, thereby reducing sediment loads and runoff to downstream areas. After initial soil disturbance or redisturbance, permanent or temporary stabilization is required within:

1. Three calendar days as to the surface of all perimeter controls, dikes, swales, ditches, perimeter slopes, and all slopes steeper than 3 horizontal to 1 vertical (3:1); and
2. Seven calendar days as to all other disturbed areas on the project site except for those areas under active grading.

Stabilization requirements are found in the 2011 Maryland Standards and Specifications for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control. These include details on mulching, plant species, and seeding rates. Straw is the preferred mulch for stabilizing disturbed areas after seeding. Straw mulch is uniformly spread at a rate of 2 tons per acre to a depth of 1 to 2 inches. Adequate stabilization requires 95% groundcover. If environmental conditions, such as winter weather, prevent or delay seed germination, it is important to use a method of anchoring mulch to prevent erosion. Options include wood cellulose fiber, binders, and plastic netting.

Sequence of Construction

The sequence of construction describes the relationship between the implementation and maintenance of erosion and sediment control practices, including permanent and temporary stabilization, and the various stages or phases of earth disturbance and construction. The first consideration when planning how to prevent sediment-laden water from running off-site is to limit the amount of disturbed earth to the greatest extent possible. A well designed plan will include stages of development that ensure only areas under active development are exposed.

Whether an area is considered to be under active grading is dependent upon the sequence of construction for a particular project. The timing of rough grading, building construction, utility installation, road construction, and final grading is considered when a sequence is developed. The sequence of construction must be reviewed to evaluate whether a construction site is stabilized in accordance with Maryland regulations.