

# Mulching For Construction Sites (1058)

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Technical Standard

## I. Definition

Mulching is the application of organic material to the soil surface to protect it from raindrop impact and overland flow. Mulch covers the soil and absorbs the erosive impact of rainfall and reduces the flow velocity of runoff.

## II. Purpose

This practice may be used to:

- Reduce soil erosion
- Aid in seed germination and establishment of plant cover
- Conserve soil moisture

## III. Conditions Where Practice Applies

This practice may be applied on exposed soils as a temporary control where soil grading or landscaping has taken place or in conjunction with temporary or permanent seeding. Mulching is generally not appropriate in areas of concentrated flow.

## IV. Federal, State, and Local Laws

Users of this standard shall comply with applicable federal, state and local laws, rules, regulations or permit requirements governing mulching. This standard does not contain the text of federal, state, or local laws.

## V. Criteria

This section establishes the minimum standards for design, installation and performance requirements.

### A. Site Preparation:

Soil surface shall be prepared prior to the application of mulch in order to achieve the desired purpose and to ensure optimum contact between soil and mulch. All areas to be mulched shall be reasonably free of rills and gullies.

### B. Materials:

Mulch shall consist of natural biodegradable material such as plant residue (including but not limited to straw, hay, wood chips, bark and wood cellulose fiber), or other equivalent materials of sufficient dimension (depth or thickness) and durability to achieve the intended effect for the required time period.

Mulch shall be environmentally harmless to wildlife and plants. Materials such as gravel, plastic, fabric, sawdust, municipal solid waste, *solid waste byproducts*<sup>1</sup>, shredded paper, and non-biodegradable products shall not be used.

Mulch shall be free of diseased plant residue (i.e. oak wilt), *noxious weed* seeds, harmful chemical residues, heavy metals, hydrocarbons and other known environmental toxicants.

Marsh hay shall not be used as mulch in lowland areas but may be used on upland sites to prevent the spread of invasive, non-native species (i.e. reed canary grass) commonly found in marsh hay.

Straw and hay mulch that will be crimped shall have a minimum fiber length of 6 inches.

<sup>1</sup> Words in the standard that are shown in italics are described in X. Definitions. The words are italicized the first time they are used in the text.

Wood chips or wood bark shall only be used for sites that are not seeded.

C. Application Rate:

1. Mulch shall cover a minimum of 80% of the soil surface for unseeded areas. For seeded areas, mulch shall be placed loose and open enough to allow some sunlight to penetrate and air to circulate but still cover a minimum of 70% of the soil surface.
2. Mulch shall be applied at a uniform rate of 1½ to 2 tons per acre for sites that are seeded, and 2 to 3 tons per acre for sites that are not seeded. This application results in a layer of ½ to 1½ inches thick for seeded sites, and 1½ to 3 inches thick for sites not seeded.
3. Wood chips or wood bark shall be applied at a rate of 6 to 9 tons per acre to achieve a minimum of 80% ground cover. This application should result in a layer of wood chips or wood bark ½ to 1½ inches thick.

D. Mulch Anchoring Methods

Anchoring of mulch shall be based on the type of mulch applied, site conditions, and accomplished by one of the following techniques:

1. Crimping

Immediately after spreading, the mulch shall be anchored by a mulch crimper or equivalent device consisting of a series of dull flat discs with notched edges spaced approximately 8 inches apart. The mulch shall be impressed in the soil to a depth of 1 to 3 inches.

2. Polypropylene Plastic, or Biodegradable Netting

Apply plastic netting over mulch application and staple according to manufacturer's recommendations.

3. Tackifier

Tackifier shall be sprayed in conjunction with mulch or immediately

after the mulch has been placed. Tackifiers must be selected from those that meet the WisDOT Erosion Control Product Acceptability List (PAL). Asphalt based products shall not be applied.

The tackifiers shall be applied at the following minimum application rates per acre:

- a. Latex-Base: mix 15 gallons of adhesive (or the manufacturer's recommended rate which ever is greater) and a minimum of 250 pounds of recycled newsprint (pulp) as a tracer with 375 gallons of water.
- b. Guar Gum: mix 50 pounds of dry adhesive (or the manufacturer's recommended rate which ever is greater) and a minimum of 250 pounds of recycled newsprint (pulp) as tracer with 1,300 gallons of water.
- c. Other Tackifiers: (Hydrophilic Polymers) mix 100 pounds of dry adhesive (or the manufacturer's recommended rate which ever is greater) and a minimum of 250 pounds of recycled newsprint (pulp) as a tracer with 1,300 gallons of water.

**VI. Considerations**

- A. Wood products typically absorb available soil nitrogen as they degrade, thus making it unavailable for seed.
- B. The use of mulch behind curb and gutter may not be desirable unless anchored by netting, because air turbulence from nearby traffic can displace the mulch. Consider the use of erosion mat or sod as an alternative.
- C. In areas where lawn type turf will be established, the use of tackifiers is the preferred anchoring method. Crimping will tend to leave an uneven surface and plastic netting can become displaced and entangled in mowing equipment.

- D. A heavier application of mulch may be desired to prevent seedlings from being damaged by frost.
- E. It may be beneficial to apply polyacrylimide in addition to mulch. Refer to WDNR Technical Standard (1050) Erosion Control Land Application of Anionic Polyacrylamide for information about the advantages and proper use of polymers.
- F. Concentrated flows above the site where mulch is applied should be diverted.
- G. Mulch should be placed within 24 hours of seeding.
- H. Mulching operations should not be performed during periods of excessively high winds that would preclude the proper placement of mulch.
- I. Materials such as gravel may be effective for erosion control but are not considered mulches.

**VII. Plans and Specifications**

- A. Plans and specifications for mulching shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose. The plans and specifications shall address the following:
  - 1. Type of mulch used
  - 2. Application rate
  - 3. Timing of application
  - 4. Method of anchoring
- B. All plans, standard detail drawings, or specifications shall include schedules for installation, inspection, and maintenance. The responsible party shall be identified.

**VIII. Operation and Maintenance**

Mulch shall, at a minimum, be inspected weekly and within 24 hours after every precipitation event that produces 0.5 inches of rain or more during a 24-hour period.

Mulch that is displaced shall be reapplied and properly anchored. Maintenance shall be completed as soon as possible with consideration to site conditions.

**IX. References**

WisDOT’s Erosion Control Product Acceptability List (PAL) can be found on the WisDOT web site:  
<https://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-business/eng-consultants/cnslt-rsrcs/tools/pal/default.aspx>

Printed copies are no longer being distributed.

**X. Definitions**

Noxious weed (V.B): Any weed a governing body declares to be noxious within its respective boundaries. The State of Wisconsin list of noxious weeds can be found in Statute 66.0407.

Solid Waste Byproducts (V.B): Includes industrial, commercial, residential, and agricultural wastes that have been processed, incinerated, or composted and still contain inorganic wastes such as glass and metals and organic wastes including plastics, textiles, rubber, leather, and other miscellaneous organic wastes which may be toxic or hazardous in nature.