

Description and Purpose

A straw bale barrier is a series of straw bales placed on a level contour to intercept sheet flows. Straw bale barriers pond sheet-flow runoff, allowing sediment to settle out.

Suitable Applications

Straw bale barriers may be suitable:

- As a linear sediment control measure:
 - Below the toe of slopes and erodible slopes
 - As sediment traps at culvert/pipe outlets
 - Below other small cleared areas
 - Along the perimeter of a site
 - Down slope of exposed soil areas
 - Around temporary stockpiles and spoil areas
 - Parallel to a roadway to keep sediment off paved areas
 - Along streams and channels
- As linear erosion control measure:
 - Along the face and at grade breaks of exposed and erodible slopes to shorten slope length and spread runoff as sheet flow

Objectives

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

- SE-1 Silt Fence
- SE-5 Fiber Rolls
- SE-6 Gravel Bag Berm
- SE-8 Sandbag Barrier



- At the top of slopes to divert runoff away from disturbed slopes
- As check dams across mildly sloped construction roads

Limitations

Straw bale barriers:

- Are not to be used for extended periods of time because they tend to rot and fall apart
- Are suitable only for sheet flow on slopes of 10 % or flatter
- Are not appropriate for large drainage areas, limit to one acre or less
- May require constant maintenance due to rotting
- Are not recommended for concentrated flow, inlet protection, channel flow, and live streams
- Cannot be made of bale bindings of jute or cotton
- Require labor-intensive installation and maintenance
- Cannot be used on paved surfaces
- Should not be used for drain inlet protection
- Should not be used on lined ditches
- May introduce undesirable non-native plants to the area

Implementation

General

A straw bale barrier consists of a row of straw bales placed on a level contour. When appropriately placed, a straw bale barrier intercepts and slows sheet flow runoff, causing temporary ponding. The temporary ponding provides quiescent conditions allowing sediment to settle. Straw bale barriers also interrupt the slope length and thereby reduce erosion by reducing the tendency of sheet flows to concentrate into rivulets, which erode rills, and ultimately gullies, into disturbed, sloped soils.

Straw bale barriers have not been as effective as expected due to improper use. These barriers have been placed in streams and drainage ways where runoff volumes and velocities have caused the barriers to wash out. In addition, failure to stake and entrench the straw bale has allowed undercutting and end flow. Use of straw bale barriers in accordance with this BMP should produce acceptable results.

Design and Layout

- Locate straw bale barriers on a level contour.
 - Slopes up to 10:1 (H:V): Straw bales should be placed at a maximum interval of 50 ft (a closer spacing is more effective), with the first row near the toe of slope.
 - Slopes greater than 10:1 (H:V): Not recommended.

- Turn the ends of the straw bale barrier up slope to prevent runoff from going around the barrier.
- Allow sufficient space up slope from the barrier to allow ponding, and to provide room for sediment storage.
- For installation near the toe of the slope, consider moving the barrier away from the slope toe to facilitate cleaning. To prevent flow behind the barrier, sand bags can be placed perpendicular to the barrier to serve as cross barriers.
- Drainage area should not exceed 1 acre, or 0.25 acre per 100 ft of barrier.
- Maximum flow path to the barrier should be limited to 100 ft.
- Straw bale barriers should consist of two parallel rows.
 - Butt ends of bales tightly
 - Stagger butt joints between front and back row
 - Each row of bales must be trenched in and firmly staked
- Straw bale barriers are limited in height to one bale laid on its side.
- Anchor bales with either two wood stakes or four bars driven through the bale and into the soil. Drive the first stake towards the butt joint with the adjacent bale to force the bales together.
- See attached figure for installation details.

Materials

- **Straw Bale Size:** Each straw bale should be a minimum of 14 in. wide, 18 in. in height, 36 in. in length and should have a minimum mass of 50 lbs. The straw bale should be composed entirely of vegetative matter, except for the binding material.
- **Bale Bindings:** Bales should be bound by steel wire, nylon or polypropylene string placed horizontally. Jute and cotton binding should not be used. Baling wire should be a minimum diameter of 14 gauge. Nylon or polypropylene string should be approximately 12 gauge in diameter with a breaking strength of 80 lbs force.
- **Stakes:** Wood stakes should be commercial quality lumber of the size and shape shown on the plans. Each stake should be free from decay, splits or cracks longer than the thickness of the stake, or other defects that would weaken the stakes and cause the stakes to be structurally unsuitable. Steel bar reinforcement should be equal to a #4 designation or greater. End protection should be provided for any exposed bar reinforcement.

Costs

Straw bales cost \$5 - \$7 each. Adequate labor should be budgeted for installation and maintenance.

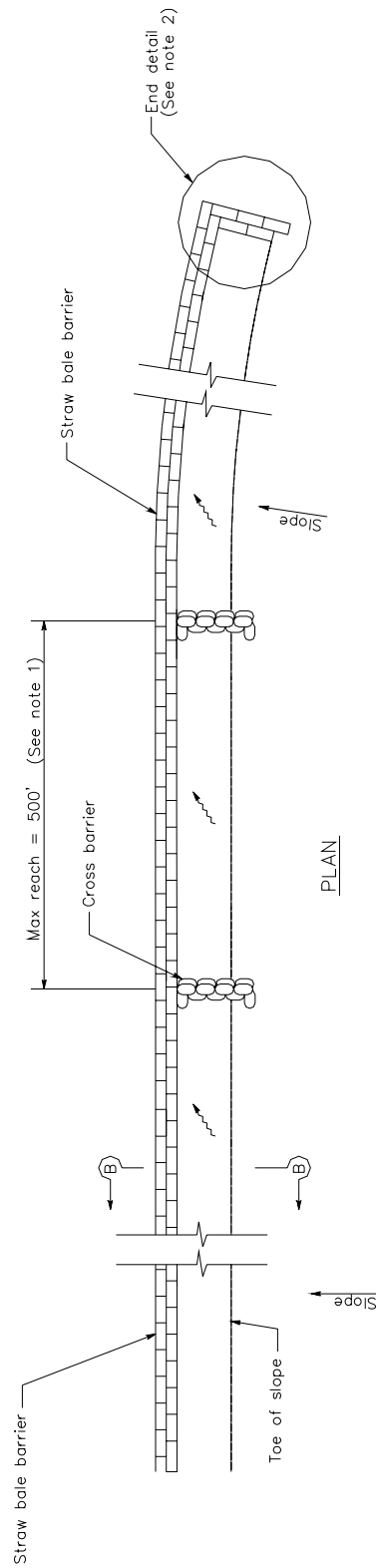
Inspection and Maintenance

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.
- Straw bales degrade, especially when exposed to moisture. Rotting bales will need to be replaced on a regular basis.
- Replace or repair damaged bales as needed.
- Repair washouts or other damages as needed.
- Sediment that accumulates in the BMP must be periodically removed in order to maintain BMP effectiveness. Sediment should be removed when the sediment accumulation reaches one-third of the barrier height. Sediment removed during maintenance may be incorporated into earthwork on the site or disposed at an appropriate location.
- Remove straw bales when no longer needed. Remove sediment accumulation, and clean, re-grade, and stabilize the area. Removed sediment should be incorporated in the project or disposed of.

References

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



NOTES

1. Construct the length of each reach so that the change in base elevation along the reach does not exceed 1/2 the height of the linear barrier. In no case shall the reach length exceed 500'.
2. The end of barrier shall be turned up slope.
3. Dimension may vary to fit field condition.
4. Stake dimensions are nominal.
5. Place straw bales tightly together.
6. Tamp embedment spoils against sides of installed bales.
7. Drive angled wood stake before vertical stake to ensure tight abutment to adjacent bale.
8. Sandbag cross barriers should be a min of 1/2 and a max of 2/3 the height of the linear barrier.
9. Sandbag rows and layers should be offset to eliminate gaps.

LEGEND

→ DIRECTION OF FLOW



