5.3 Applying Mulch

Spreading *mulch* made of bark, woody material or hay intercepts rain and protects the soil from sheet erosion and *rill* erosion. Its effect is immediate.

*Mulch* also retains soil moisture, which helps a vegetative cover to quickly establish. It can be used in conjunction with grassing and will usually improve the germination rate and extend the period in which grass can be used.

*Mulch* applied to a road edge providing protection and support for grass seeding.
**Where and when to use**

1. Where an instant barrier is necessary to reduce surface erosion on sites where there is high risk of soil erosion that would cause problems to the site infrastructure or sensitive areas such as water bodies.
2. Where hydro-seeding would be too costly.
3. When seasonal timing will not allow conventional sowing or hydro-seeding methods.
4. Around fills on road/track ‘in-bends’ where there is flowing water or a risk of direct connection of sediment to flowing water or on earthworks for river crossings.
5. Use mulch once road or track construction, stormwater control, and erosion and sediment control measures are completed.

**Where not to use**

1. On steep and exposed earthworks where wind and rain may blow or wash the mulch away.
2. If the mulch contains pest plant seeds.

**Application**

1. Spread hay mulch evenly by hand for smaller areas.
2. Apply hay ensuring exposed soil cannot be seen through the mulch (this typically requires about 6000 kg/ha).
3. Bark or woody chip mulch can be applied with an excavator.

**Maintenance**

1. Prepare a routine maintenance plan including heavy rainfall response measures.
2. Re-apply after one month in specific areas (high risk) if grass seed germination is normally expected and/or ground cover vegetation has not established well.
3. If the mulch cover has been lost reapply it immediately on high risk sites. The target should be to an 80%+ maintenance free cover.

**Other methods**

1. Hay mulch followed by grassing generally improves the strike rate.

**Technical specification guidelines**

Not applicable to this guide.

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**National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry**

Particular relevant regulations for soil stabilisation are 32, 55, 60.