Dust Control

Dust control measures can be used to prevent dust from being transported by wind (Source: Dust Pro, Inc., no date)

Description

Dust control BMPs reduce surface activities and air movement that causes dust to be generated from disturbed soil surfaces. Construction sites can generate large areas of soil disturbance and open space for wind to pick up dust particles. Limited research at construction sites has established an average dust emission rate of 1.2 tons/acre/month for active construction (WA Dept. of Ecology, 1992). Airborne particles pose a dual threat to the environment and human health. First, dust can be carried offsite, thereby increasing soil loss from the construction area and increasing the likelihood of sedimentation and water pollution. Second, blowing dust particles can contribute to respiratory health problems and create an inhospitable working environment.

Applicability

Dust control measures are applicable to any construction site where there is the potential for air and water pollution from dust traveling across the landscape or through the air. Dust control measures are especially important in arid or semiarid regions, where soil can become extremely dry and vulnerable to transport by high winds. Implement dust control measures on all construction sites where there will be major soil disturbances or heavy equipment construction activity such as clearing, excavation, demolition, or excessive vehicle traffic. Earthmoving activities are the major source of dust from construction sites, but traffic and general disturbances can also be major contributors (WA Dept. of Ecology, 1992). The dust control measures that are implemented at a site will depend on the topography and land cover of the site and its soil characteristics and expected rainfall.

Siting and Design Considerations

When designing a dust control plan for a site, the amount of soil exposed will dictate the quantity of dust generation and transport. Therefore, construction sequencing and disturbing only small areas at a time can greatly reduce problematic dust from a site. If land must be disturbed, consider using temporary stabilization measures before disturbance. A number of methods can be used to control dust from a site; not all will be applicable to a site. The owner, operator, and contractors responsible for dust control at a site will have to determine which practices accommodate their needs according to specific site and weather conditions. The following is a brief list of some control measures and design criteria.

Sprinkling/Irrigation. Sprinkling the ground surface with water until it is moist is an effective dust control method for haul roads and other traffic routes (Smolen et al., 1988). This practice can be applied to almost any site.

Vegetative Cover. In areas not expected to handle vehicle traffic, vegetative stabilization of disturbed soil is often desirable. Vegetative cover provides coverage to surface soils and slows wind velocity at the ground surface, thus reducing the potential for dust to become airborne.

Mulch. Mulching can be a quick and effective means of dust control for a recently disturbed area (Smolen et al., 1988).

Wind Breaks. Wind breaks are barriers (either natural or constructed) that reduce wind velocity through a site and, therefore, reduce the possibility of suspended particles. Wind breaks can be trees or shrubs left in place during site clearing or constructed barriers such as a wind fence, snow fence, tarp curtain, hay bale, crate wall, or sediment wall (USEPA, 1992).

Tillage. Deep tillage in large open areas brings soil clods to the surface where they rest on top of dust, preventing it from becoming airborne.

Stone. Stone can be an effective dust deterrent for construction roads and entrances or as a mulch in areas where vegetation cannot be established.

Spray-on Chemical Soil Treatments (palliatives). Examples of chemical adhesives include anionic asphalt emulsion, latex emulsion, resin-water emulsions, and calcium chloride. Chemical palliatives should be used only on mineral soils. When considering chemical application to suppress dust, determine whether the chemical is biodegradable or water-soluble and what effect its application could have on the surrounding environment, including waterbodies and wildlife.

Table 1 shows application rates for some common spray-on adhesives, as recommended by Smolen et al. (1988).

Table 1. Application rates for spray-on adhesives (Source: Smolen et al., 1988)

Spray-on adhesive	Water dilution	Type of nozzle	Application (gal/acre)
Anionic asphalt emulsion	7:1	Coarse spray	1,200
Latex emulsion	12.5:1	Fine spray	235
Resin in water	4:1	Fine spray	300

Limitations

Applying water to exposed soils can be time intensive, and if done to excess, could result in excess runoff from the site or vehicles tracking mud onto public roads. Use chemical applications sparingly and only on mineral soils (not muck soils) because their misuse can create additional surface water pollution from runoff or contaminate ground water. Chemical applications might also present a health risk if excessive amounts are used.

Maintenance Considerations

Because dust controls are dependent on specific site and weather conditions, inspection and maintenance requirements are unique for each site. Generally, however, dust control measures involving application of either water or chemicals require more monitoring than structural or vegetative controls to remain effective. If structural controls are used, inspect them regularly for deterioration to ensure that they are still achieving their intended purpose.

Effectiveness

Mulch. Can reduce wind erosion by up to 80 percent.

Wind Breaks/Barriers. For each foot of vertical height, an 8- to 10-foot deposition zone develops on the leeward side of the barrier. The permeability of the barrier will change its effectiveness at capturing windborne sediment.

Tillage. Roughening the soil can reduce soil losses by approximately 80 percent in some situations.

Stone. The size of the stones can affect the amount of erosion to take place. In areas of high wind, small stones are not as effective as 20 cm stones.

Spray-on Chemical Soil Treatments (palliatives). Effectiveness of polymer stabilization methods range from 70 percent to 90 percent, according to limited research.

Cost Considerations

Costs for chemical dust control measures can vary widely depending on specific needs of the site and the level of dust control desired.

References

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