Utility work and erosion control

Erosion caused by utilities working in your right-of-ways can clog ditches, culverts, and storm drains, and pollute water bodies. The utility project may take a few days, but the results will affect local communities for far longer. You can help protect your water resources and your investment in drainage systems by developing and enforcing a local utility permit process.

"Proper and prompt restoration aids significantly with erosion control," says Bob Fasick, WisDOT highway operations engineer. "If a utility is finished with the job, they need to get their disturbed soil restored right away instead of leaving it out there for a couple weeks." WisDOT has begun denying right-of-way permits to utilities whose crews have a record of not promptly restoring their projects, he says.

Inlets need to be protected if utilities are working near curbs and gutters. Inspect the project to make sure contractors are using the correct fabric type. Only filter fabric works in storm inlets, Fasick advises. Silt fence material does not (see sidebar).

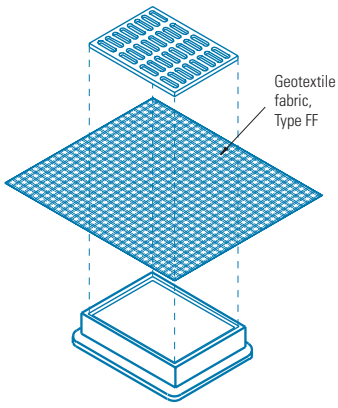
During the project it is important to cover spoils piles overnight in case of rain, to clean and repair erosion control devices after major rainstorms, and to use temporary measures to keep soil in place when permanent restoration will be delayed.

"If a big storm comes through during the project, crews need to clean out the silt fence, clean out soil by the straw bales or around inlets, and replace silt fence if it's damaged," says Fasick.

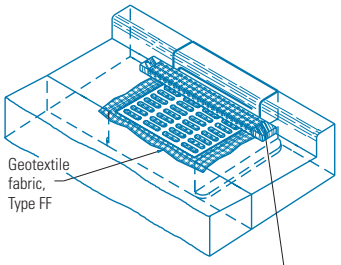
Projects done in late fall and early winter could produce a lot of sediment if not properly managed. One option is to seed and mulch the areas using a fast growing grass. Temperatures will usually stay warm enough well into November that temporary grasses can sprout and hold the soil. Fiber or jute mats work well, as does sod, though it is more expensive.

Utility project managers and local officials should always look beyond the right-of-way. If waterways and wetlands are nearby, DNR may require special permits and stronger measures to keep soil in place. "Be aware of the landscape around the area and consult with the local DNR staff person," Fasick advises.

Inlet protection, Type B (without curb box)



Inlet protection, Type C (with curb box)



Only filter fabrics are approved for protecting inlets as part of erosion control. You can find approved types and suppliers on the WisDOT Product Acceptability List (PAL). See Resources, page 6 for web address.

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