

BMP C126: Polyacrylamide (PAM) for Soil Erosion Protection

Purpose

Polyacrylamide (PAM) is used on construction sites to prevent soil erosion.

Applying PAM to bare soil in advance of a rain event significantly reduces erosion and controls sediment in two ways. First, PAM increases the soil's available pore volume, thus increasing infiltration through flocculation and reducing the quantity of stormwater runoff. Second, it increases flocculation of suspended particles and aids in their deposition, thus reducing stormwater runoff turbidity and improving water quality.

Conditions of Use

PAM shall not be directly applied to water or allowed to enter a water body.

In areas that drain to a sediment pond, PAM can be applied to bare soil under the following conditions:

- During rough grading operations.
- In Staging areas.
- Balanced cut and fill earthwork.
- Haul roads prior to placement of crushed rock surfacing.
- Compacted soil roadbase.
- Stockpiles.
- After final grade and before paving or final seeding and planting.
- Pit sites.
- Sites having a winter shut down. In the case of winter shut down, or where soil will remain unworked for several months, PAM should be used together with mulch.

Design and Installation Specifications

PAM may be applied with water in dissolved form. The preferred application method is the dissolved form.

PAM is to be applied at a maximum rate of 2/3 pound PAM per 1,000 gallons water (80 mg/L) per 1 acre of bare soil. [Table 4.1.9](#) can be used to determine the PAM and water application rate for a disturbed soil area. Higher concentrations of PAM **do not** provide any additional effectiveness.

**Table 4.1.9
PAM and Water Application Rates**

Disturbed Area (ac)	PAM (lbs)	Water (gal)
0.50	0.33	500
1.00	0.66	1,000
1.50	1.00	1,500
2.00	1.32	2,000
2.50	1.65	2,500
3.00	2.00	3,000
3.50	2.33	3,500
4.00	2.65	4,000
4.50	3.00	4,500
5.00	3.33	5,000

The Preferred Method:

- Pre-measure the area where PAM is to be applied and calculate the amount of product and water necessary to provide coverage at the specified application rate (2/3 pound PAM/1000 gallons/acre).
- PAM has infinite solubility in water, but dissolves very slowly. Dissolve pre-measured dry granular PAM with a known quantity of clean water in a bucket several hours or overnight. Mechanical mixing will help dissolve the PAM. Always add PAM to water - not water to PAM.
- Pre-fill the water truck about 1/8 full with water. The water does not have to be potable, but it must have relatively low turbidity – in the range of 20 NTU or less.
- Add PAM /Water mixture to the truck
- Completely fill the water truck to specified volume.
- Spray PAM/Water mixture onto dry soil until the soil surface is uniformly and completely wetted.

An Alternate Method:

PAM may also be applied as a powder at the rate of 5 lbs. per acre. This must be applied on a day that is dry. For areas less than 5-10 acres, a hand- held “organ grinder” fertilizer spreader set to the smallest setting will work. Tractor-mounted spreaders will work for larger areas.

The following shall be used for application of powdered PAM:

- Powered PAM shall be used in conjunction with other BMPs and not in place of other BMPs.
- Do not use PAM on a slope that flows directly into a stream or wetland. The stormwater runoff shall pass through a sediment control BMP prior to discharging to surface waters.

- Do not add PAM to water discharging from site.
- When the total drainage area is greater than or equal to 5 acres, PAM treated areas shall drain to a sediment pond.
- Areas less than 5 acres shall drain to sediment control BMPs, such as a minimum of 3 check dams per acre. The total number of check dams used shall be maximized to achieve the greatest amount of settlement of sediment prior to discharging from the site. Each check dam shall be spaced evenly in the drainage channel through which stormwater flows are discharged off-site.
- On all sites, the use of silt fence shall be maximized to limit the discharges of sediment from the site.
- All areas not being actively worked shall be covered and protected from rainfall. PAM shall not be the only cover BMP used.
- PAM can be applied to wet soil, but dry soil is preferred due to less sediment loss.
- PAM will work when applied to saturated soil but is not as effective as applications to dry or damp soil.
- Keep the granular PAM supply out of the sun. Granular PAM loses its effectiveness in three months after exposure to sunlight and air.
- Proper application and re-application plans are necessary to ensure total effectiveness of PAM usage.
- PAM, combined with water, is very slippery and can be a safety hazard. Care must be taken to prevent spills of PAM powder onto paved surfaces. During an application of PAM, prevent over-spray from reaching pavement as pavement will become slippery. If PAM powder gets on skin or clothing, wipe it off with a rough towel rather than washing with water- this only makes cleanup messier and take longer.
- Some PAMs are more toxic and carcinogenic than others. Only the most environmentally safe PAM products should be used.

The specific PAM copolymer formulation must be anionic. **Cationic PAM shall not be used in any application because of known aquatic toxicity problems.** Only the highest drinking water grade PAM, certified for compliance with ANSI/NSF Standard 60 for drinking water treatment, will be used for soil applications. Recent media attention and high interest in PAM has resulted in some entrepreneurial exploitation of the term "polymer." All PAM are polymers, but not all polymers are PAM, and not all PAM products comply with ANSI/NSF Standard 60. PAM use shall be reviewed and approved by the local permitting authority.

- PAM designated for these uses should be "water soluble" or "linear" or "non-crosslinked". Cross-linked or water absorbent PAM, polymerized in highly acidic (pH<2) conditions, are used to maintain soil moisture content.
- The PAM anionic charge density may vary from 2-30 percent; a value of 18

percent is typical. Studies conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)/ARS demonstrated that soil stabilization was optimized by using very high molecular weight (12- 15 mg/mole), highly anionic (>20% hydrolysis) PAM.

- PAM tackifiers are available and being used in place of guar and alpha plantago. Typically, PAM tackifiers should be used at a rate of no more than 0.5-1 lb. per 1000 gallons of water in a hydromulch machine. Some tackifier product instructions say to use at a rate of 3 –5 lbs. per acre, which can be too much. In addition, pump problems can occur at higher rates due to increased viscosity.

*Maintenance
Standards*

- PAM may be reapplied on actively worked areas after a 48-hour period.
- Reapplication is not required unless PAM treated soil is disturbed or unless turbidity levels show the need for an additional application. If PAM treated soil is left undisturbed a reapplication may be necessary after two months. More PAM applications may be required for steep slopes, silty and clayey soils (USDA Classification Type "C" and "D" soils), long grades, and high precipitation areas. When PAM is applied first to bare soil and then covered with straw, a reapplication may not be necessary for several months.
- Loss of sediment and PAM may be a basis for penalties per [RCW 90.48.080](#).