



Minnesota  
Pollution  
Control  
Agency

# Homeowner fact sheet

## Erosion prevention and sediment control

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If your new home is like most, the builder did some grading of your lot, removing some or all of the existing vegetation or ground cover. You may have new sod, or you might just have a bare soil yard.

When rain falls on exposed soil, it can wash soil away from the land. This runoff can erode bare ground, wash away valuable topsoil and make landscaping more difficult. It also carries soil, nutrients and other pollutants into streets, gutters and ditches, where it then travels untreated to lakes, rivers, streams or wetlands. Polluted runoff can cause excessive growth of weeds and algae in water bodies and reduce recreational opportunities such as swimming and fishing. Sediment-laden runoff can also clog ponds and wetlands and reduce floodwater retention.

Your homebuilder was required to take steps to keep soil and sediment from leaving your lot. Permanent stabilization such as sod may have been installed on part or all of your property. If not, you can help protect the environment by ensuring that soil and sediment are not washed off your property and that grass or other ground cover become well established.

### Temporary stabilization

When construction on your home is complete, verify that your builder installed temporary stabilization measures to minimize erosion and prevent sediment-laden runoff from discharging into streets, gutters, ditches, streams, lakes and wetlands. Silt fence or other sediment control should be in place on the down slope perimeter, and near curb and gutters, ditches, streams, lakes and

wetlands. Mulch or similar material must cover exposed soil. In addition, any piles of soil on your lot must be at least 200 feet from surface water and curb and gutters. Soil piles must also be stabilized.

As a homeowner, you are responsible for inspecting and maintaining temporary stabilization measures until permanent ground cover is established on your yard.

*Commonly used temporary stabilization methods include:*

**Temporary vegetation** includes annual grasses that sprout quickly such as annual rye, oats and winter wheat. These grow quickly with little care and can protect the soil from rain, slow runoff, and act as a filter. They will not provide permanent cover. You may need to fertilize, water or reseed to ensure the vegetative cover is maintained until permanent cover is installed.

**Mulching** (straw, wood chips, wood fiber blanket, and so on) provides temporary cover to protect the soil from rain. Mulching may be the only option during the winter when seeding or sodding is not possible. Mulch must stay in place to be effective. Netting, stakes or chemical binders are used to anchor some types of mulch. Be sure to reinstall washed-out mulch and anchor if necessary until permanent cover is established.

**Silt fences** are curtains of permeable fabric erected on stakes to restrict runoff. The silt fence slows runoff and allows it to puddle or pond, so soil and sediment can settle out before water leaves a site. Other sediment control devices include berms, biologs, and

more. Proper installation and maintenance of sediment control devices is essential for their performance. Reinstall or replace ripped, collapsed, undermined or decomposed fencing. Remove sediment if deposits reach 1/3 of the silt fence height. Remove silt fences and other sediment control devices only after permanent stabilization is established.

**Downspout extenders** may be used to protect temporarily stabilized areas from roof runoff. Extenders can direct water from your roof gutters to paved or grassed areas. Be aware that direct discharge to storm sewers (as in the photo) may not be allowed in your area. Be sure to check with your local authorities. Check extenders regularly to insure proper performance. Remove extenders following permanent stabilization.

## Permanent stabilization

Establish permanent vegetation or ground cover as soon as possible. Mulch, silt fences, downspout extenders, or other temporary stabilization measures can be removed following permanent stabilization.

*Please consider the following as you make your landscaping decisions:*

- Keep and protect existing native trees, bushes and plants on your property.
- Schedule landscaping projects for dry weather.
- Terrace slopes to slow the flow of runoff.
- Plant fast-growing annual and perennial grasses.
- Water new seed or sod lightly, every day or two, for two weeks to keep soil moist.
- Use well adapted native plants that reduce runoff and require little maintenance.
- Plant plenty of trees and shrubs to reduce runoff.
- Plant lawn alternatives like rain gardens, prairie plants, or no mow lawn mixes.
- Route downspouts and other drainage to heavily vegetated areas.
- Use crushed rocks, pavers or other alternatives that allow rainwater to seep into the ground for walkways, recreational vehicle (RV) pads, decks, patios and drives.
- Leave an unmowed buffer strip of thick vegetation along stream banks and lakeshores.
- Use caution when landscaping near your home, especially next to the foundation. Changes in the final grade can lead to water pooling and basement water damage.
- Use a landscaping firm experienced in stormwater design.



**Extenders can direct water from your roof gutters to paved or grassed areas. Be aware that direct discharge, like this, to storm sewers may not be allowed in your area. Be sure to check with your local authorities.**

- Check with your local government to make sure your landscape design meets any local regulations.

## Control stormwater pollution

Finally, you can also help area lakes and streams for as long as you own your home. Stormwater runoff does not go to a wastewater treatment plant. It flows directly into our lakes and streams. There are many ways you can reduce polluted runoff:

- Keep trash, leaves and grass clippings off streets and out of storm drains, streams and lakes.
- Pick up and bury or flush pet wastes.
- Keep cars tuned up and repair leaks.
- Properly dispose of hazardous wastes.
- Don't pour oil, pesticides, paint or other materials down the storm drain.
- Minimize the use of pesticides, fertilizers and de-icing materials.
- Test your soil and use zero phosphate fertilizer if possible.
- Wash your car on the lawn or use a commercial car wash.

For more information on stabilization measures, contact your local building inspector or Soil and Water Conservation District Office.

You can also visit Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Stormwater Web site at [www.pca.state.mn.us/water/stormwater/index.html](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/stormwater/index.html) or call the MPCA front desk, 651-296-6300 or 800-646-6247.