



Grass Roots for Conservation



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Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District

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BUILDING SOLUTIONS

"All human beings owe their existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains."

I have always admired famed radio personality Paul Harvey. This particular quote has resonated with me throughout my adult life mainly because, in just a few words, I am reminded that from the beginning of time soil and water are what makes this planet unique. If topsoil were to disappear and our ability to hold onto the rain ever came about we would lose our opportunity to produce.

So how do we make sure we never lose the opportunity to produce? It's pretty simple, US. WE are the opportunity! WE carry around the tool box! WE put the

tools needed in that tool box! WE decide what WE do and when WE do it! Everything from the time WE wake up to the time WE go to bed WE are in control. The same goes with conservation. WE have the choice on how WE are stewards of this land. Being good stewards of this land is one of our most important jobs.

WE have just come through a year of chaos and now it is up to US on how WE move forward. As difficult as this last year was, it's really not been that bad, just a little unhandy. WE are a great community and strive to be better than WE started. WE control how WE move ahead in this New Year and how WE can be that positive force.

And now I am reminded of another great Paul Harvey quote "Growth is the process of responding positively to change." A lot has changed, and guess what, a lot more will change. So what will WE do? I will tell you what the SWCD will do and that is to keep building, creating, adding and working off the long legacy of programs that have been and will be implemented. No matter what size, big or small. In a pot, in the backyard, in a planter box, in a field, etc. WE have a choice in how we handle conservation. WE build off the past, work through the present and design for the future. WE are the solution.

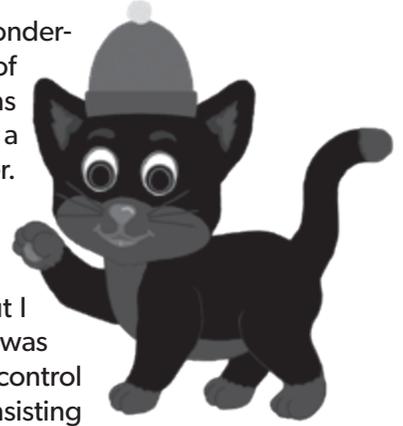


BLOGGING BMP'S

A monthly Blog discussing the Best Management Practices (BMP's) that must be used to aid in erosion and sediment control.

Welcome back to another edition of Blogging BMP's! I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and I wish nothing but better things in this new year. Speaking of the New Year, how about that ice storm that came through the area? It only seems fitting that the day we finally escaped the clutches of 2020, Mother Nature found a way to quarantine us for another day or two and in some cases, took out the power. You just can't make this stuff up!

As I sat in my house, admiring the glistening trees and broken limbs that had fallen to the ground beneath them, my phone began to vibrate letting me know that I had an email. Ordinarily I would not pay attention to this on a holiday, but I was incredibly bored really interested in who is emailing me on New Years Day. I was surprised to see that it was a contractor with a question; "How do I do an erosion control inspection when I can't see the dirt?" At first I was a little irritated that he was insisting on doing the inspection that day, but then I got to thinking, maybe this is a question many people have and this person was the only one with the courage to ask. So let's talk about soil in the winter and how we can continue to manage it even in the snow and ice.



Frozen ground, snow, and the pending thaw create special considerations for erosion and sediment control. Frozen soils can make it difficult to stabilize sites or install sediment and erosion control BMPs properly or effectively. This often results in bare soil and slopes throughout winter that erode with snowmelt and spring runoff. It is recommended to prepare sites for winter weather, maintain Best Management Practices (BMPs) through the winter season, and restore BMP effectiveness for sediment control in early spring. The following is a list of tips and suggestions to help maintain effective sediment and erosion control throughout the winter season.

Winter Maintenance

- Check erosion and sediment control measures after each rain or as snow melts to ensure they are functioning effectively.
- Minimize new soil exposure and stabilize exposed sites immediately.
- Inspect perimeter controls at least monthly to ensure their structural integrity. Use sandbags or other measures to repair damaged silt fence when frozen ground makes driving posts infeasible.
- Keep sandbags, erosion blankets and gravel on-site to address problems that need immediate attention.

Winter Construction

- Enlarge and stabilize site entrances to enable snow stockpiling.
- Where practicable, provide a 15-foot-wide buffer around all perimeter controls to prevent damage from snow clearing or a 25-foot wide buffer from snow storage areas.
- Stockpile frozen materials (e.g., permafrost or frost layer removed during winter construction) separately and at least 100 feet away from any wetland or water resource area. Stockpiles of frozen materials can melt in the spring and become unworkable and difficult to transport because of high moisture content.
- Limit ground disturbance. Generally, the exposed area should include only the area where work will occur in the following 15 days and that can be mulched in one day before a rainfall or snowfall event.
- Sediment barriers installed during frozen conditions may include erosion control mix berms, continuous contained berms or sand bag berms. Installing erosion control blankets is not recommended on frozen ground or if more than one inch of snow is present

We can go into greater detail on Re-establishing BMPs in the Spring as that is when the risk of high sediment discharges are greatest. For now, continue to inspect the soil by waiting for those thaws and making sure that they don't take the sediment with them. For more information on this or any other BMP that we cover here, visit our website at www.elkcoswcd.org or check out our Facebook page. I usually end with a catchy pun here that is related to my topic, but for some reason this month's *slipped* my mind. Oh well, it was an ICE try.

Ten Ways to Save Money, Energy and Protect Your Health This Winter

EPA News Release, WASHINGTON—With winter quickly approaching, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is highlighting ten tips for Americans to protect their health, save money, and lower energy while enjoying the winter holiday season.

- 1. Maintain your heating equipment to lower utility bills.** Heating and cooling costs account for about \$1,000 – nearly half of a home's total annual energy bill. Maintaining the efficiency of your home's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system can have a big effect on your utility bills. Dirt and neglect can impact the efficiency of your HVAC system and are some of the top causes of heating system failure. Schedule an HVAC checkup with a licensed HVAC contractor to make sure your system is operating at peak performance. Also, check your system's air filter every month and change it when it's dirty or at a minimum, every three months. A dirty filter will slow down air flow and make the system work harder to keep you warm or cool – wasting energy. <http://www.energystar.gov/homeimprovement>
- 2. Download EPA's free Apps to help protect your health.** The AIRNow app allows users to enter a zip code and get current particle pollution and ozone levels and forecasts for more than 400 cities across the country. The Ultraviolet (UV) Index provides an hourly forecast of the UV radiation levels from the sun. Both are available for Apple and Android phones. Learn more about these apps and the others: <http://m.epa.gov/apps/index.html>
- 3. Decorate for the holidays with Energy Star light strings that can last up to 10 times longer.** Energy Star-qualified light strings use about 65 percent less electricity than incandescent light strings and are available in a variety of colors, shapes and lengths. They save energy and are more durable, shock-resistant and cooler to the touch. If every decorative light string sold in the U.S. this year were Energy Star qualified, Americans would save \$80 million in utility bills and one billion pounds of greenhouse gas emissions would be prevented. http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=find_a_product.showProductGroup&pgw_code=DS
- 4. Lower the temperature in your home to increase savings up to 12 percent.** Control your home's temperature while away or asleep by using one of the pre-programmed settings. Programming the thermostat to turn the temperature down 8 degrees for 7 hours each night and an additional 7 hours each weekday could result in a seasonal heating savings of approximately 12 percent. For the average home, this could result in savings of about \$180. http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr_save_energy_at_home
- 5. Check for water leaks and install WaterSense products to save approximately \$170 per year.** The average household spends as much as \$500 per year on their water and sewer bill, but approximately \$170 per year can be saved by installing water-efficient fixtures and appliances. <http://www.epa.gov/watersense>
- 6. Reduce your food waste. Feed people, not landfills.** Food is the single largest type of waste going to landfills and incinerators. Americans disposed of approximately 33 million tons of food waste in 2010. When excess food, leftover food, and food scraps are disposed of in a landfill, they decompose and become a significant source of methane - a potent greenhouse gas. Much of the food that is discarded in landfills is actually safe, wholesome food that could have been used to feed people. So when you are thinking about making your family dinner, think about how you can reduce your food waste to save money, help communities, and protect the environment. <http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserve/materials/organics/food/fd-house.htm>
- 7. Look for the Design for the Environment label on more than 2,800 products during winter cleaning.** EPA's Designed for the Environment (DfE) logo differentiates products that use only the safest ingredients to protect people, our pets, and the environment. In 2011, Americans using DfE products cut the use of harmful chemicals by more than 756 million pounds. <http://www.epa.gov/dfe/>
- 8. Test your home for radon gas, 1 in 15 homes may have elevated levels.** Radon, a colorless odorless gas, is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers and levels can increase during colder months. Purchase an affordable Do-It-Yourself test kit online or at a local hardware store to determine the level in your home. Addressing high levels often costs the same as other minor home repairs. <http://www.epa.gov/radon>
- 9. Learn before you burn and cut firewood use by more than 30 percent.** The Burn Wise program has best burn practices to help better protect your home and your health. Never burn garbage, cardboard, ocean driftwood or wet wood. If you replace an old wood stove with a more efficient one, efficiency can increase by 50 percent, 1/3 less wood can be used for the same heat and 70 percent less particle pollution indoors and out are produced. <http://www.epa.gov/burnwise/>
- 10. Prevent Pests.** Now is the time when pests such as insects and rodents may try to move indoors. Eliminate sources of food, water, and shelter to reduce pest problems. Prevent pests by using caulk to eliminate cracks, repair water leaks, remove clutter, and clean up crumbs and other food sources. If you decide to use a pesticide, read the label first. The pesticide label is your guide to using pesticides safely and effectively. It contains pertinent information that you should read and understand before you use a pesticide product. <http://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/>



Send your questions to Walden the Worm

The "Dear Abby" of conservation farming!

Q: Lots of speakers at field days and farmer meetings are talking about soil biology. Why are these microscopic creatures important to me if all I want is higher yields?

A: Walden here. I will try to condense a book taught topic by giving a few high points. From the underground web I learn biology deals with living organisms and vital processes. Be it animal, plant, or soil life. Yes, soil is a living organisms and farmers need to make an effort to understand how all the pieces interact. Soil needs to function as a living ecosystem for maximum crop production. The bio component of soil provides one half or more of the needed crop nutrients. To sustain soil biology four management practices are key:

1. Limit, actually better to eliminate soil disturbance (a.k.a. tillage)
2. Plant different species of crops and ground cover
3. Keep soil covered, crop residue first and the addition of cover crops are a plus
4. Keep a living root in soil as much as possible

A very important part of soil biology is mycorrhizae (fungus root). Mycorrhizae greatly enhances the ability of plants to take up phosphorus and water helping plants survive periods of drought. Remember point #1 of the 4 listed to maintain soil biology. Soil tillage will damage or destroy mycorrhizal hyphal networks. A soil with good biology excels at holding and releasing water and crop nutrients. Such a soil will turn crop residue into soil organic matter, humus, and plant food rapidly. I will help by digesting and mixing crop residue throughout the soil profile. Mr. Farmer to test your soil biology, bury your cotton underwear 2" deep. A soil with good biology will digest the organic cotton in 5 to 6 weeks. Also Google: "Soil Your Undies" for more instruction.

— Walden

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 25 SWCD Board Meeting: 5:30 PM,
SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart

February 22 SWCD Board Meeting: 5:30 PM,
SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart

March 4 79th SWCD Annual Meeting: Save the Date
Our Annual Meeting will now be Virtual.
*Look for more details in next month's
Grass Roots newsletter.*

March 15 SWCD Board Meeting: 5:30 PM,
SWCD Office, 59358 County Road 7, Elkhart

UPCOMING FSA DEADLINES

ARC/PLC SIGNUP DEADLINE

**It is time to elect coverage and enroll farms for the 2021 crop year.
Deadline is March 15th, 2021**

- Election changes to multi-year contracts are optional
- If you change your multi-year election for program year 2021, a new contract needs to be signed.

Call the office at (574) 533-4383 ext. 2 to schedule a phone appointment.

Never miss a deadline! Signup for text alerts by texting **INElkhart** to 372669. No more than one text a month.

USDA Service Centers are open for business by phone appointment only. Please contact the Elkhart County FSA and NRCS service center by phone (574) 533-4383 ext. 2 to schedule time for program services or with any questions.

SWCD - NRCS CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORY

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Ph. (574) 523-2030

www.elkcoswcd.org

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