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GSI White Paper #39

“Current Status (2018) of U.S. State Department of Transportation Agencies Regarding Use of Geosynthetic Materials”

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May 4, 2018

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Background

By virtue of federal U.S. regulations on solid waste landfill liners and covers, every state environmental agency has regulations which include geosynthetic materials to varying degrees. As such, the Geosynthetic Institute has performed surveys of these fifty state agencies and reported the information accordingly; the most recent being White Paper #37, dated March 9, 2018. This, in turn, prompted many requests to do likewise with the fifty U.S. State Departments of Transportation (DOT) agencies. One fundamental difference at the outset is that the federal U.S. government has no transportation related regulations requiring the use of geosynthetic materials, or any other materials for that matter. As a result, each state DOT acts individually and without federal regulation, although there is undoubtedly federal guidance and assistance. In this regard, various federal conferences and workshops bring together state highway and related personnel on a regular basis. In addition, the U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is extremely active at national, regional and state levels in describing and presenting new materials and fields of application as research and development occurs.

With the above described difference between environmental and transportation public agencies, we nevertheless proceeded in sending out a survey regarding geosynthetic usage to the fifty state DOT agencies. But specifically to whom? Within state DOT agencies, there are bridge departments, right-of-way departments, materials departments, geotechnical departments, etc. Thus identifying a specific individual, or individuals, required considerable searching. As a result, we received 22 state DOT responses (i.e. 44% return) insofar as the results are concerned. We sincerely thank each of these DOT agencies for responding and have sent a copy of this white paper to them accordingly. The survey questionnaire (subdivided into six discrete application areas) as it was sent to all state DOTs follows:

Survey Answers

The summary of the 22 state DOT responses to this survey is given as the appendix to this white paper. Please see it for details of each specific state's responses. That said, each of the underlined six application areas will be described in a summary fashion as follows.

Application Area #1 – Geosynthetic Reinforced Earth Walls

Mechanically stabilized earth (MSE) walls were initially developed (and patented) in the mid 1960's by Henri Vidal in France using steel strips attached to steel facing elements and extending back into the reinforced soil to a designated distance. By the 1970's, the U.S. Forest Service was using geotextile reinforcement and subsequently in the 1980's, product manufacturers began using geogrid reinforcement. This type of geosynthetic reinforced MSE walls is the target area of this set of questions. Incidentally, the FHWA uses the criterion of the angle that the wall facing makes with the horizontal to distinguish walls from slopes. If the angle is 70° or larger, it is an MSE wall, if less than 70° it is a reinforced soil slope (RSS).

To the question of “does the state permit them” to be used, 20 of 22 (91%) states answered yes. Note that this is not a permitting process, per se, it is allowing their use when professionally designed by others such as a registered professional engineer in their state. Furthermore, there are wall height limits required by 9 of these 20 states. The values range considerably, from 15 to 40 feet. For 13 states, there is no such limitation. While front drainage using gravel directly behind the wall facing is required by all MSE wall designs, back drainage behind the reinforced soil zone is a separate issue and was specifically questioned. Twelve of the 22 states (56%) require back drainage to be included, other responses were mixed. In light of the many FHWA design documents and courses having been given on the topic, we were interested if the states use such design procedures. Nineteen of the 22 states (86%) said yes, while the others were silent in this regard. Alternatively, some MSE walls with geosynthetic reinforcement are designed by “vendors” which are often geogrid manufacturers. Thirteen states of the 22 allowed for such vendor design. Regarding the actual construction operations, only 4 states require “certified inspectors”, although such a program is available at....

(see www.geosynthetic-institute.org/icpintro2.htm)

Lastly, the type of preferred wall facing was asked. Concrete panels and masonry blocks were by far the most used type of facing.

Application Area #2 – Reinforced Soil Slopes

Reinforced soil slopes (RSSs) refer to soil structures having facing angles lower than a 70° angle with the horizontal. Survey questions were similar to those of the MSE walls, but the responses were somewhat different. The reason for this is conjecture, but may be due to the lessened perceived concerns over a slope problem occurring, as compared to a wall problem. Whatever the case, all 22 states allow for RSS structures with geosynthetic reinforcement. Even further, 20 of them have no height limits; the other 2 states differ greatly, one with a maximum height of 15 feet, the other at 50 feet. Back drainage behind the reinforced soil zone is required in 11 states which mirrors the answer for MSE walls. FHWA procedures are required for design in 18 states and vendor design is allowed by 4 states. Certified inspectors for field construction are only required by 4 states.

Application Area #3 – Geotextile Specifications

In the U.S., the 50 state DOTs meet and interact regularly through an organization called the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). In 1984 they convened a group called Task Force #25 which began to develop a generic specification for geotextiles used in highway related applications. Eventually, in 1993, the effort morphed into AASHTO-M288 “Geotextile Specification for Highway Applications”. Modifications and additions were made in 1996, 1999, 2005 and 2016; the latter being a very complete and detailed 35 page document. In M288-16, a survivability table is presented providing geotextile strength properties in three different classes. This is followed by a series of six independent tables on each particular application. They are as follows; drainage (actually filtration), separation, stabilization, erosion control, silt fences and paving fabrics. The results of the survey insofar as the use of this specification for each of these applications are as follows:

- use in drainage (filtration): 15 of 22 (68%)
- use in separation: 14 of 22 (63%)
- use in stabilization 13 of 22 (59%)
- use in erosion control 11 of 22 (50%)
- use in silt fences 11 of 22 (50%)
- use in paving fabrics 4 of 22 (18%)

One last question was asked with respect to the use of AASHTO-M288-16 for a geogrid specification. In this regard, the 2016 specification presented a draft bidirectional geogrid specification. We were interested in the state’s need for such a generic specification and 12 of 22 (54%) agreed, with 5 more as “maybe” response. The other five states were not interested.

Application Area #4 - Prefabricated Highway Edge Drains

There are a number of manufactured highway edge drains consisting of a polymer drainage core surrounded by a geotextile acting as a filter and as a separator. These products arrive at a job site in the form of large rolls, either 6, 12, or 18 inches in height, and then are installed directly against the edge of highway pavements for capture and release of subsurface drainage of the gravel base course and/or subbase. In response to our questions, 13 of 22 states (59%) use these products and 10 of the 13 states (77%) have an associated product specification.

Application Area #5 – Erosion Control Products

Soil erosion touches on every aspect of our activities including highway applications. The geosynthetic industry (among others) has developed many products toward the avoidance, or mitigation of soil erosion; see GSI White Paper #38 at...

(www.geosyntheticinstitute.org/papers/paper38.htm) for details in this regard. Even further, GSI has a generic specification for one category of products, namely “turf reinforcement mats” see...

(www.geosynthetic-institute.org/grispecs/gc14.pdf)

Our questions to the state agencies and answers were as follows:

- Are these products used? 20 of 22 (91%) said yes
- Is there a specification? 17 of 22 (77%) said yes
- Is there an approved bidder’s list? 11 of 22 (50%) said yes

Application Area #6 – Waterproofing Ponds and Lagoons

We have recently been informed that several state DOT agencies were being asked to review and/or improve liners for waterproofing ponds and lagoons. With geomembranes being the main barrier material to limit leakage and migration of the liquid contents, we wondered how widespread this activity was. Three questions were asked and answered accordingly:

- Does the state have a specification? 6 of 22 (27%) said yes
- Is there a minimum lifetime? 1 of 22 (5%) said yes
- Are there installation guidelines? 2 of 22 (9%) said yes

Appendix

Geosynthetic Institute Survey of State DOT Regulations and Use of Geosynthetics - 2018

1. Geosynthetic Reinforced Earth Walls > 70°

a) does state permit them

	AL	AZ	CA	DE	FL	IA	LA	MD	MT	MS	NJ	NY	OH	OR	SD	TN	UT	VT	VA	WA	WV	WI	TOTAL	Percent	
yes	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	20	91%
no																								0	
silent						x							x											2	9%

b) Are there height limits

yes	x	x			x									x	x	x			x		x	x		9	41%
limit	15'				40'										15'						40'	22-35'		15-40'	
no			x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x		x				13	59%

c) Is back drainage used behind reinforced zone

yes	x	x	x	x	x				x			x		x			x	x		x	x			12	56%
no						x	x								x	x							x	5	22%
silent								x		x	x		x						x					5	22%

d) Design- do you use FHWA/NCHRP procedures

yes	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	19	86%
no																								0	
silent						x				x			x											3	14%

e) Do you allow vendor design

yes		x		x				x	x			x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		13	59%
no	x				x	x					x													4	18%
silent			x				x			x			x				x							5	23%

f) Do you require Certified Inspectors

yes	x										x		x						x					4	18%
no		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x			x	x	x		17	77%
silent													x											1	5%

g) What type of facing is preferred

- concrete panels
- masonry blocks
- vegetated
- No preference
- Both Concrete and Masonry

	AL	AZ	CA	DE	FL	IA	LA	MD	MT	MS	NJ	NY	OH	OR	SD	TN	UT	VT	VA	WA	WV	WI	TOTAL	Percent
concrete panels		x	x	x	x			x			x					x		x	x		x	x	11	28%
masonry blocks		x		x			x	x		x	x				x	x	x	x	x		x	x	13	33%
vegetated																							0	
No preference	x					x			x			x	x	x						x			7	17%
Both Concrete and Masonry																							9	22%

2.Geosynthetic Reinforced Earth Slopes <70°

a) Does your state permit them

- yes
- no
- silent

yes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	22	100%
no																									
silent																									

b) Are they limited in their height

- yes
- limit
- no

yes	x																				x		2	9%
limit	15'																				50'		15-50'	
no		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	20	91%

c) Is back drainage used behind reinforced zone

- yes
- no
- silent

yes	x	x	x	x				x				x		x			x	x		x	x		11	50%
no				x	x	x		x	x			x		x	x							x	9	41%
silent										x									x				2	9%

d) Design- do you use FHWA/NCHRP procedures

- yes
- no
- silent

yes	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	18	82%
no							x																1	5%
silent					x					x						x							3	13%

e) Do you allow vendor design

- yes
- no
- silent

yes				x				x									x				x		4	18%
no	x	x			x	x	x		x		x	x			x	x		x	x	x		x	14	64%
silent			x							x			x	x									4	18%

f) Do you require Certified Inspectors

	AL	AZ	CA	DE	FL	IA	LA	MD	MT	MS	NJ	NY	OH	OR	SD	TN	UT	VT	VA	WA	WV	WI	TOTAL	Percent
yes	x											x		x					x				4	18%
no		x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	17	77%
silent								x															1	5%

3. AASHTO-M288 Geotextile Specification

a) Do you use it for drainage

yes	x		x	x				x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x			x		15	68%
no		x				x																x	3	14%
other					x		x					x								x			4	18%

b) Is it used for roadway separation

yes	x			x			x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x			x		14	63%
no		x				x																x	3	14%
other			x		x							x							x	x			5	23%

c) Is it used for roadway stabilization

yes	x		x	x				x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x			x		13	59%
no		x				x							x						x			x	5	23%
other					x		x					x								x			4	18%

d) Is it used for erosion control

yes	x		x	x				x	x	x	x			x		x	x	x					11	50%
no		x				x													x		x	x	5	23%
other					x		x					x	?		x					x			6	27%

e) Is it used for silt fences

yes	x			x				x	x	x	x			x		x	x		x		x		11	50%
no		x				x									x							x	4	18%
other			x		x		x					x	?					?		x			7	32%

	AL	AZ	CA	DE	FL	IA	LA	MD	MT	MS	NJ	NY	OH	OR	SD	TN	UT	VT	VA	WA	WV	WI	TOTAL	Percent	
f) Is it used for asphalt overlay fabrics																									
yes	x						x							x		x								4	18%
no		x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x				x		x	x	x	x	x	x	15	68%	
other			x									?	?										3	14%	

g) Do you feel need for generic spec for geogrids																									
yes		x		x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x		x			x		x		12	54%	
no	x		x												x			x				x	5	23%	
maybe						x	x			x							x			x			5	23%	

4. Prefabricated geocomposite HW edge drains

a) Do you use these products																									
yes	x	x	x			x			x			x	x	x			x		x	x	x	x	13	59%	
no				x	x			x			x				x	x		x					7	32%	
silent							x			x													2	9%	

b) If yes, do you have a specification																									
yes	x	x	x			x			x				x	x					x	x	x		10	66%	
no												x						x					3	20%	
silent							x			x													2	14%	

5. Geosynthetic Erosion Control Products

a) Do you use these products																									
yes	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	20	91%	
no			x								x												2	9%	
silent																							0		

b) Do you have a specification																									
yes	x			x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	17	77%	
no		x	x								x											x	4	18%	
silent																				x			1	5%	

c) Do you work from an approved bidder list																									
yes	x				x	x	x		x		x	x	x		x							x	11	50%	
no		x		x											x		x	x	x	x	x		8	36%	
silent			x					?		x													3	14%	

6. Geomembranes for waterproofing ponds/lagoons

a) Do you have a specification

	AL	AZ	CA	DE	FL	IA	LA	MD	MT	MS	NJ	NY	OH	OR	SD	TN	UT	VT	VA	WA	WV	WI	TOTAL	Percent	
yes		x	x					x	x			x							x					6	27%
no				x		x	x			x	x		x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x		13	59%
silent	x				x										x									3	14%

b) Is there a minimum lifetime

yes								x																1	5%
no		x	x	x		x	x					x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x		14	63%
silent	x				x				x	x	x				x	x								7	32%

c) Are there installation guidelines

yes		x						x																2	9%
no				x		x	x				x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x		12	55%
silent	x		x		x				x	x					x	x			x					8	36%