FORGET THE OLD HECP ALPHABET SOUP-NEW CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM KNOCKS THE GUESSWORK OUT OF HECPS

EROSION CONTROL TECHNOLOGY COUCIL

As most landscape designers know, choosing the correct Hydraulic Erosion Control Product (HECP) should be a scientific, solution-based decision. However, it has become increasingly more of a guessing game based on all of the acronyms of products. Since the 1960s, landscapers have used HECPs to control erosion and establish vegetation. Over the past 50 years, the quality, ability, and science of these products have improved tremendously. Yet, while HECPs may do more than ever before, choosing one is like diving into an alphabet soup and hoping you pull out the letters you need. Even if you find one that will do the job, comparing similar HECPs based on performance and cost is nearly impossible.

How did HECP shopping turn into such a muddled mess?

When something as useful as HECPs comes into the marketplace, technology will continue to advance through competition. Over the past several years, more and more manufacturers have jumped into the race to make high-performance HECPs. Each of these companies seeks to differentiate their product from the rest.

Their goal of standing out in the crowd has led to an increase of products via new chemical formulas and tweaks to already well-known products. Manufacturers come up with their own names for their products in attempt to set themselves apart by highlighting the product composition characteristics, not the performance characteristics. This creates two major problems. First, buyers are unable to keep up with the vast changes of product names, categories and where the products should be used. The average project manager or designer has limited time to research the performance characteristics of a product. They typically only know they have a sloped area that needs protection from an estimated amount of rainfall for a specific length of time. Second, if a project specification has called for a certain kind of HECP that is based on composition not

performance, the user is limited to purchasing that exact HECP. If a newer, more affordable product has come on the market that is proven to be as effective, it goes unused.

As a result, purchasing an HECP has become a time-consuming estimation game that is filled with concerns regarding value versus performance. Does your site really need a Fiber Reinforced Matrix? Is it a waste of money? Did you overspend? Alternatively, is skimping on cost for a lower performing product going to cost more in the long run?

The Erosion Control Technology Council wants users to use performance as the basis for deciding which products to use on your job site. It has created a performance-based classification system, which allows a designer to choose a product without concern about composition. The user can follow the project specification while using least expensive and most effective product for the needs of the project.

Choosing performance over composition

Scott Harrison of Terra Novo, an HECP manufacturer in California, said of the new classification system, “It doesn’t matter what the HECP is made up of. It matters what you can expect out of the product’s performance.”

Imagine you go to buy a car. You meet with a salesperson. You have some questions about how fast the car can go from zero to sixty, how long the tires should last, and how well the brakes work. Instead of answering these questions, the salesperson tells you about the chemical makeup of the rubber used to make the timing belt or the steel used to make the bolts. While that might be nice to know, it doesn’t answer your two most important questions: how successfully will this car get you from point A to point B? And will it get you there at a better price than the car parked next to it?

The same is true for HECPs. A designer starts with a problem. There is a steep slope in a Seattle park, which is subject to a constant drizzle. Like the car buyer, the designer needs to know what will hold the ground layer in place well enough and long enough to establish vegetation. The designer asks: what will get my project from point A to point B at the best price? The composition of the HECP is a side note. One that designers are becoming increasingly aware can be manipulated by companies. What one manufacturer deems necessary to make up a Bonded Fiber

Matrix (BFM) may not be up to par at another manufacturer. For instance, within the new ECTC classification system most BFMs would fall under Type 4. However, not every company's BFM will test at Type 4 performance levels. The buyer who purchases a BFM believing they are buying a certain level of performance may be disappointed down the line. Conversely, the buyer who purchases a Type 4 product can expect a certain level of results on their project.

When the ECTC created the new classifications, they sought to help the end user. Jeff Ward of Central Fiber, LLC, who has been selling HECPs for over 14 years, says that the biggest advantage of the new classification system goes to the "landowner or end-user that ultimately gets a better product." The classifications are broken down into solution-based answers. The product composition is irrelevant. What is important is what the HECP will do for erosion control and vegetation establishment.

A manufacturer who labels their HECP with the ECTC classification must employ independent testing. Unlike the confusing alphabet soup of acronyms, the ECTC classification system clearly states what a product will do under similar conditions. This will provide the customer with the best opportunity for the most economical solution for their jobsite.

How to choose an HECP using the new Classification system

The ECTC has created a simple chart to help designers find the right classification of HECP required for projects. The new classification chart creates clear-cut parameters with each Classification fulfilling certain needs based on important aspects of the project: erosion control product longevity requirement, slope gradient, slope length, and vegetation requirement. Results from a standard large-scale erosion control test and vegetation study give guidance to expected erosion control and vegetation establishment performance versus bare soil.

To choose the correct HECP, a project designer needs to know the important aspects of their project site. Once these parameters are clear, the designer must simply match them to the ECTC Classification Chart. For instance, if a site needs an HECP that will last three months on 2:1 (H:V) slope 50 feet long, ECTC Type 4 HECP is required. It doesn't matter if that Type 4 is a BFM, MSFM, or an HM. You never have to consider these acronyms and what they mean again. Instead of wasting time

getting to know initials, chemistry and fiber types, you can spend your time learning about your project's site.

Remember, these Types eradicate guesswork. In the past, a designer might try to weigh different aspects of a site. Perhaps there is little rain, but a steep or long slope. The buyer is stuck trying to figuring out the composition of HECPs versus the specifications of the project site, not to mention the sales pitch from the manufactures themselves. Now, buyers must simply choose a HECP that fulfills all of the minimum requirements of a certain Classification. If the project site only has a two-month rainy season, but is on a 1:1 slope, the site requires ECTC Type 5 HECP. No negotiations needed.

In the end, the new classification system will help designers and end users save time choosing the best product for each of their projects. As buyers demand to know which ECTC Type an HECP falls into, more manufacturers will get their products tested for performance. The results will save buyers time, money, and headaches.