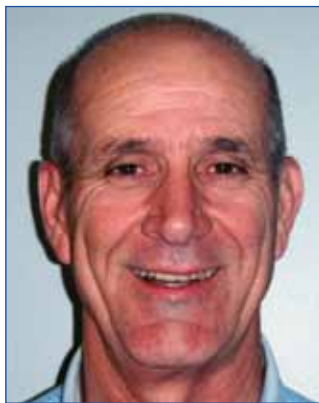


Get That Water Out of Here

Understanding the ways
we view erosion control



Jerry B. Sanders

We all know that water is the most powerful force impacting surface erosion and soil stability. How do we control this mighty adversary that flows across our landscape, removing precious top soil and continually destabilizing slopes and hillsides?

One answer is to install drainage mechanisms and structures that would not only carry the excessive flows following rain events, but also would accelerate the expulsion of free water from slopes and hillsides.

Over the years, we have developed a number of drainage procedures. The development of these procedures typically is followed by plenty of new products, each promising to give us the control we seek.

But keep in mind that before we can implement many drainage procedures and new products, we need to first understand when and where to use them. Our desire to control the move-

ment of surface and subsurface water must be tempered with an understanding that each installation does not only impact the immediate site, but also the surrounding area. For every procedure we implement and every installation we ponder, we must take into consideration the potential negative and positive impacts that it will have.

While attending the International Erosion Control Assn.'s annual conference this past February, I was reminded that our best method of control is actually not to control, but to redirect and mimic the drainage systems and velocity controls that we see in nature.

Of course, due to our impact, which accelerates the flow and

increases the stress and loading of slopes and hillsides, we have stretched the natural ability of nature's drainage systems. The new products and methods that have been developed can be used to enhance nature's ability when carefully implemented. Rather than developing a totally new drainage system, it might be wise for us to use our advancements to simply control our impact on the existing systems and to enhance the original drainage systems' ability to survive.

It is a reality that in some instances, we must take drastic measures to control erosion. However, as professionals, it is our job to analyze and remediate prior to getting to this point.

The hard part is disciplining ourselves so that we do not stagnate in our approach to drainage problems and our use of products. It takes a great deal more effort to approach each drainage problem that we encounter with an open mind than it does

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to simply use what we have seen used before. Each new drainage problem we encounter offers us another opportunity to do a better job.

If we focus our attention on what caused the problem—rather than the visible results—the mitigation procedure required can take on a new look. We have the procedures and the products, and nature gives us the variable. **[SWS]**

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