

Description and Purpose

Polyacrylamide (PAM) is a chemical that can be applied to disturbed soils at construction sites to reduce erosion and improve settling of suspended sediment.

PAM increases the soil's available pore volume, thus increasing infiltration and reducing the quantity of stormwater runoff that can cause erosion. Suspended sediments from PAM treated soils exhibit increased flocculation over untreated soils. The increased flocculation aids in their deposition, thus reducing stormwater runoff turbidity and improving water quality.

Suitable Applications

PAM is suitable for use on disturbed soil areas that discharge to a sediment trap or sediment basin. PAM is typically used in conjunction with other BMPs to increase their performance.

PAM can be applied to the following areas:

- Rough graded soils that will be inactive for a period of time.
- Final graded soils before application of final stabilization (e.g., paving, planting, mulching).
- Temporary haul roads prior to placement of crushed rock surfacing.
- Compacted soil road base.
- Construction staging, materials storage, and layout areas.

Objectives

EC	Erosion Control
SE	Sediment Control
TR	Tracking Control
WE	Wind Erosion Control
NS	Non-Stormwater Management Control
WM	Waste Management and Materials Pollution Control

Legend:

- Primary Objective
- Secondary Objective

Targeted Constituents

Sediment
Nutrients
Trash
Metals
Bacteria
Oil and Grease
Organics

Potential Alternatives

None



- Soil stockpiles.
- Areas that will be mulched.

Limitations

- There is limited experience in California with use of PAM for erosion and sediment control.
- PAM shall not be directly applied to water or allowed to enter a water body.
- Do not use PAM on a slope that flows into a water body without passing through a sediment trap or sediment basin.
- PAM will work when applied to saturated soil but is not as effective as applications to dry or damp soil.
- Some PAMs are more toxic and carcinogenic than others. Only the most environmentally safe PAM products should be used.
- The specific PAM copolymer formulation must be anionic. **Cationic PAM shall not be used in any application because of known aquatic toxicity problems.** Only the highest drinking water grade PAM, certified for compliance with ANSI/NSF Standard 60 for drinking water treatment, will be used for soil applications.
- PAM designated for erosion and sediment control should be “water soluble” or “linear” or “non-cross linked”.
- A sampling and analysis plan must be incorporated into the SWPPP as PAM may be considered to be a source of non-visible pollutants.

Implementation**General**

PAM shall be used in accordance with the following general guidance:

- Pam shall be used in conjunction with other BMPs and not in place of other BMPs, including both erosion controls and sediment controls.
- Stormwater runoff from PAM treated soils should pass through a sediment control BMP prior to discharging to surface waters.
 - When the total drainage area is greater than or equal to 5 acres, PAM treated areas shall drain to a sediment basin.
 - Areas less than 5 acres shall drain to sediment control BMPs, such as a sediment trap, or a minimum of 3 check dams per acre. The total number of check dams used shall be maximized to achieve the greatest amount of settlement of sediment prior to discharging from the site. Each check dam shall be spaced evenly in the drainage channel. Through which stormwater flows are discharged off site.
- Do not add PAM to water discharging from site.

- On PAM treated sites, the use of silt fence and fiber rolls shall be maximized to limit the discharges of sediment to sediment traps and sediment basins.
- All areas not being actively worked one should be covered and protected from rainfall. PAM should not be the only cover BMP used.
- PAM can be applied to wet soil, but dry soil is preferred due to less sediment loss.
- Keep the granular PAM supply out of the sun. Granular PAM loses its effectiveness in three months after exposure to sunlight and air.
- Proper application and re-application plans are necessary to ensure total effectiveness of PAM usage.
- PAM, combined with water, is very slippery and can be a safety hazard. Care must be taken to prevent spills of PAM powder onto paved surfaces. During an application of PAM, prevent over spray from reaching pavement, as pavement will become slippery. If PAM powder gets on skin or clothing, wipe it off with a rough towel rather than washing with water this only makes cleanup messier and longer.
- Recent high interest in PAM has resulted in some entrepreneurial exploitation of the term "polymer". All PAMs are polymer, but not all polymers are PAM, and not all PAM products comply with ANSI/NSF Standard 60. PAM use shall be reviewed and approved by the local permitting authority.
- The PAM anionic charge density may vary from 2-30%; a value of 18% is typical. Studies conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)/ Agricultural Research Service (ARS) demonstrated that soil stabilization was optimized by using very high molecular weight (12-15 mg/mole), highly anionic (>20% hydrolysis) PAM.
- PAM tackifiers are available and being used in place of guar and alpha plantago. Typically, PAM tackifiers should be used at a rate of no more than 0.5-1 lb per 1,000 gallons of water in hydro mulch machine. Some tackifier product instructions say to use at a rate of 3-5 lbs per acre, which can be too much. In addition, pump problems can occur at higher rates due to increased viscosity.

Preferred Application Method

PAM may be applied in dissolved form with water, or it may be applied in dry, granular, or powdered form. The preferred application method is the dissolved form.

PAM is to be applied at a maximum rate of 1/2 pound PAM per 1000 gallons water per 1 acre of bare soil. Table 1 and Figure 1 can be used to determine the PAM and water application rate for a disturbed soil area. Higher concentrations of PAM **do not** provide any additional effectiveness.

Table 1 PAM and Water Application Rates		
Disturbed Area (acre)	PAM (lbs)	Water (gallons)
0.50	0.25	500
1.00	0.50	1,000
1.50	0.75	1,500
2.00	1.00	2,000
2.50	1.25	2,500
3.00	1.50	3,000
3.50	1.75	3,500
4.00	2.00	4,000
4.50	2.25	4,500
5.00	2.50	5,000

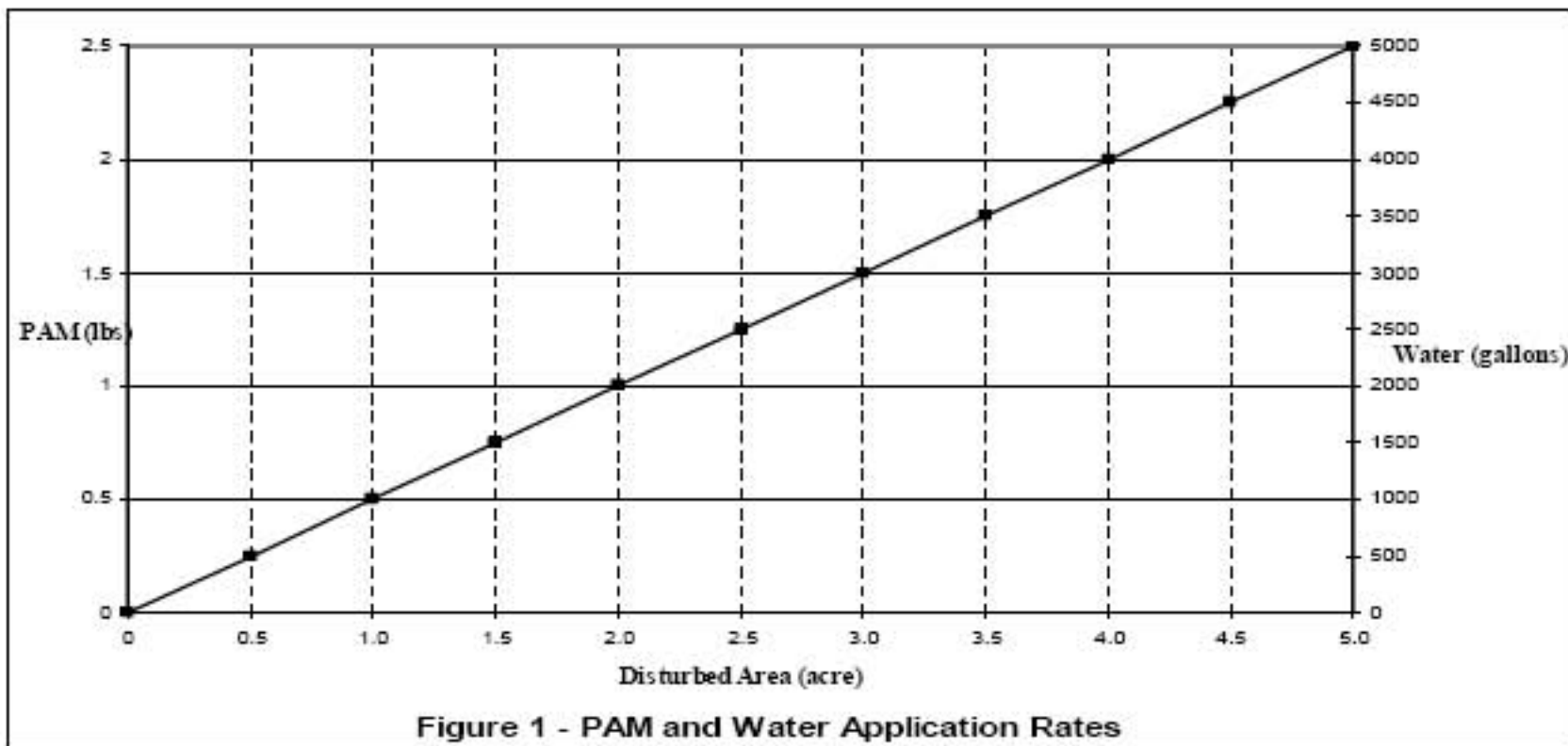


Figure 1 - PAM and Water Application Rates

- Pre-measure the area where PAM is to be applied and calculate the amount of product and water necessary to provide coverage at the specified application rate (1/2 pound PAM/1000 gallons/acre).
- PAM has infinite solubility in water, but dissolves very slowly. Dissolve pre-measured dry granular PAM with a known quantity of clean water in a bucket several hours or overnight. Mechanical mixing will help dissolve the PAM. Always add PAM to water – not water to PAM.

- Pre-fill the water truck about 1/8 full with water. The water does not have to be potable, but it must have relatively low turbidity – in the range of 20 NTU or less.
- Add the dissolved PAM and water mixture to the truck.
- Fill the water truck to specified volume for the amount of PAM to be applied.
- Spray the PAM/water mixture onto dry soil until the soil surface is uniformly and completely wetted.

Alternate Application Method

PAM may also be applied as a powder at the rate of 5 lbs per acre. This must be applied on a day that is dry. For areas less than 5-10 acres, a hand held “organ grinder” fertilizer spreader set to the smallest setting will work. Tractor mounted spreaders will work for larger areas.

Costs

- PAM: \$1.30 - \$5.50/lb (material cost only).

Inspection and Maintenance

- Inspect BMPs prior to forecast rain, daily during extended rain events, after rain events, weekly during the rainy season, and at two-week intervals during the non-rainy season.
- Areas where erosion is evident should be repaired and BMPs re-applied as soon as possible. Care should be exercised to minimize the damage to protected areas while making repairs, as any area damaged will require re-application of BMPs.
- PAM must be reapplied on actively worked areas after a 48-hour period if PAM is to remain effective.
- Reapplication is not required unless PAM treated soil is disturbed or unless turbidity levels show the need for an additional application.
- If PAM treated soil is left undisturbed a reapplication may be necessary after two months.
- More PAM applications may be required for steep slopes, silty and clayey soils (USDA Classification Type “C” and “D” soils), long grades, and high precipitation areas.
- When PAM is applied first to bare soil and then covered with straw, a reapplication may not be necessary for several months.
- Discharges from PAM treated areas must be monitored for non-visible pollutants.

References

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