

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

POND SEALING OR LINING  
COMPACTED CLAY TREATMENT

(No.)

CODE 521D

**DEFINITION**

A liner for a pond or waste storage impoundment constructed using compacted soil without soil amendments.

**PURPOSE**

To reduce seepage losses from ponds or waste storage impoundments constructed for water conservation and environmental protection.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

This practice applies where:

- In-place soils at the site would exhibit seepage rates in excess of acceptable limits or would allow an unacceptable migration of contaminants from the impoundment.
- An adequate quantity of soil suitable for constructing a clay liner without amendments is available at an economical haul distance.

**CRITERIA**

**Criteria for Limiting Seepage.** Compacted soil liners for ponds not storing animal waste shall be designed to reduce seepage to rates that will allow the pond to function suitably as intended.

Compacted soil liners for waste storage impoundments shall be designed to reduce specific discharge (unit seepage) to rates recommended in the National Engineering Handbook Series, Part 651, Agricultural Waste Management Field Handbook (AWMFH),

Chapter 10, Appendix 10D, or rates mandated in state regulations if they are more restrictive. Lower specific discharge rates may be used at the discretion of the designer.

Use the methods for computing unit seepage rates contained in the AWMFH, Chapter 10, Appendix 10D, or other generally accepted methods for computing unit seepage rates may also be used.

**Liner filter compatibility.** Compacted soil liners shall be filter-compatible with the sub-grade on which they are compacted to prevent loss of the liner soil into larger openings in the sub-grade material. The National Engineering Handbook, Part 633, Chapter 26-Gradation Design of Sand and Gravel Filters, provides criteria on filter compatibility.

**Liner Thickness.** Appropriate soil mechanics tests shall be performed on potential liner sources for liners to be used in waste storage or treatment facilities. These results shall be used to design the minimum liner thickness. The maximum thickness of a constructed lift shall be six (6) inches. The minimum thickness of the finished compacted liner shall be the greater of:

1. That required to achieve the specific discharge (unit seepage) design value selected by the designer,
2. That required by state regulations, or
3. Twelve (12) inches.

The minimum liner thickness for ponds not designed to store and/or treat waste shall be according to the following table. The water depth to be used in the table is the normal full pool storage depth in the impoundment.

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Water Depth (feet)	Liner Thickness (inches)
≤ 16	12
16.1 – 24	18
24.1 – 30	24

**Liner Construction.** Use methods described in Appendix 10D to the AWMFH for liner construction.

**Liner Protection.** The soil liner shall be protected against damage caused by the effects of water surface fluctuations, desiccation and cracking, wave action, animal activity, and rainfall during periods when the liner is exposed. A protective soil cover, at least six (6) inches thick and compacted with rubber tired hauling equipment, shall be installed over the compacted liner. Material used for the protective cover should be the same as that used for the compacted liner if an adequate supply is available. If an alternate source is necessary, soil in permeability group II, III, or IV, as defined in AWMFH, Chapter 10, Appendix 10D, shall be used.

Adequate measures such as concrete slabs or ramps shall be installed to prevent compacted liner damage from pipe outlets, solids and sludge removal activities, and agitation equipment.

Design should include measures to protect against damage to the compacted liner due to uplift water pressures if a seasonal high water table occurs at a level above that of the lowest potential level of liquid in the impoundment. Examples of protective design measures are the use of perimeter drains to lower the water table, maintaining minimum liquid depth in the impoundment, and using liners thick enough to resist uplift water pressures.

Under severe conditions, a protective soil cover may not adequately protect the liner from desiccation. For example, a soil liner constructed with very high plasticity soils which are exposed to long periods of hot, low humidity conditions may constitute a severe condition. Additional design measures might be considered which include installing a

geomembrane in conjunction with a cover soil to protect the liner from desiccation adequately.

**Side Slopes.** The side slopes of ponds or waste storage impoundments should be 4H: 1V or flatter to facilitate compaction of soil on the slopes when the bathtub method of construction as described in Appendix 10D, AWMFH is used. Slopes as steep as 2H: 1V can be considered if the stair-step method of construction as described in Appendix 10D to the AWMFH is used and appropriate soil mechanics testing indicates it would be stable. Maintenance requirements should also be considered when selecting side slopes.

### CONSIDERATIONS

Consider using a flexible geomembrane or geosynthetic clay liner for sites that have water or waste storage depths greater than 24 feet.

Alternatives to compacted clay liners should be considered for poor foundation conditions such as karstic bedrock, joints, and other discontinuities of the underlying bedrock or other environmentally sensitive areas.

### PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for compacted soil liners for ponds and waste storage impoundments shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose. Plans and specifications shall include such drawings, specifications, material requirements, quantities, construction requirements, equipment requirements, quality control requirements, and other documents as necessary to describe the work to be done.

For waste storage and/or treatment impoundments, moisture and density (compaction) requirements shall be clearly shown on the construction drawings.

### OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Maintenance activities required for this practice consist of those operations necessary to prevent and/or repair damage to the compacted soil liner. This includes, but is not limited to, excluding animals and equipment

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from the treated area; repairing damage to the liner occurring from erosion during initial filling; erosion resulting from wave action after the impoundment fills; and erosion caused by agitation, pumping operations, as well as activities involved in removal of solids and sludge. Damage that might be caused by

roots from trees and large shrubs should be prevented by removing such vegetation at first appearance. If the liner is damaged, any disturbed or eroded areas should be repaired to restore the liner to its original thickness and condition.