Natural Resources Conservation Service

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

SPRINKLER SYSTEM

Code 442

(Ac.)

DEFINITION

A distribution system that applies water by means of nozzles operated under pressure.

PURPOSE

This practice is applied as part of a conservation management system to accomplish one or more of the following:

- Efficient and uniform application of water on irrigated lands
- Improve plant condition, productivity, health and vigor
- Prevent the entry of excessive nutrients, organics, and other chemicals in surface and groundwater
- Improve condition of soil contaminated with salts and other chemicals
- Reduce particulate matter emissions to improve air quality
- Reduce energy use

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This standard applies to the planning and functional design of all sprinkler system components (e.g., laterals, risers, nozzles, heads, and pressure regulators).

Individual sprinkler design discharge rates covered by this standard typically have design nozzle discharge rates exceeding 1 gallon per minute and wet the entire field surface uniformly.

Areas must be suitable for sprinkler water application, and have a water supply of adequate quantity and quality for intended purpose(s).

This standard applies to planning and design of sprinkler application systems for:

- meeting crop water demands
- crop cooling, frost protection, or bloom delay
- leaching or reclamation of saline or sodic soils, or soils contaminated by other chemicals that can be controlled by leaching
- application of chemicals, nutrients, and/or waste water
- dust and particulate control from:
    - confined animal pen areas
    - unpaved road
    - staging areas
    - equipment storage yards

This standard applies to renozzling existing sprinkler systems to reduce pressure, reduce flow rate, or increase distribution uniformity.

This standard does not include criteria for mini- or micro-sprinkler systems, which are covered by NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Code 441, Irrigation System, Microirrigation.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

The sprinkler system must be an integral part of a conservation plan that addresses intended purpose(s) and operator needs. Base system selection on site evaluation, operating conditions, soils, and topography. Design sprinkler positions, flow rates, and operating pressures within manufacturers' recommended ranges.

The installation and operation of this practice shall comply with all federal, state and local laws, rules and regulations. This conservation practice is exempt from receiving coverage under TDEC's (Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation) ARAP permits as long as NRCS provides technical or financial assistance for this conservation practice. This exemption allows this conservation practice to be installed adjacent to streams and/or wetlands, and for the outlet or inlet of the structure to be placed down through the stream channel bank and into the closest edge of the stream channel. The TDEC ARAP exemption does not change the permitting requirements for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers permits (404), the Tennessee Valley Authority permits (26a – if located within the Tennessee River drainage area.), or any permits that may be required by local units of government.

The exception to the TDEC ARAP exemption described in the previous paragraph is where the conservation practice is planned to impound the spring, stream, place fill material in a wetland, or directly impact a stream channel and/or a wetland. If this conservation practice is planned on a stream or in a wetland, then it is no longer exempt from the ARAP process. If planned on a stream or in a wetland, these conservation practices are required to apply for and receive U. S. Army Corps of Engineers permits (404), Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation permits (ARAP), Tennessee Valley Authority permits (26a – if located within the Tennessee River drainage area.), and any permits that may be required by local units of government. All conditions listed within the permits shall be followed during the installation of the practice.

System Capacity. Sprinkler capacity must be adequate to accomplish the primary purpose(s) of the system. Determine capacity based on appropriate design application efficiency. Select design application efficiency based on system type and purpose.

In computing capacity requirements, provide an allowance for reasonable application water losses, system maintenance downtime, and auxiliary water requirements such as leaching.

Management Plan. An Irrigation Water Management Plan meeting NRCS Conservation Practice Standard 449, Irrigation Water Management, shall be developed for this practice, unless the purpose of the practice is waste water application. Where implemented for waste application as a component of a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP), a nutrient management plan shall be developed that meets the requirements of NRCS Conservation Practice Standard 590, Nutrient Management.

Pipelines. The design of main lines, submains, and supply lines shall ensure that required water quantities can be conveyed to all operating lateral lines at required pressures. For detailed criteria, see NRCS Conservation Practice Standard 430 – Irrigation Pipeline.

Pump and Power Unit. Where required, pump and power units shall be adequate to efficiently operate the sprinkler system at design capacity and total dynamic head. For detailed criteria, see NRCS Conservation Practice Standard 533, Pumping Plant.

Criteria Applicable to Efficient and Uniform Application of Water on Irrigated Lands.

Design Application Rate and Depth. Select application rates and depths that will minimize runoff, translocation of water or soil, and deep percolation (except for planned leaching).

Design maximum application rate to be consistent with soil intake rate, slope, and conservation practices used on the land. If sprinkler design application rate exceeds soil infiltration rates, use boom backs or additional storage features such as furrow dikes and enhanced residue management to minimize runoff. In lieu of approved runoff model simulation results (e.g., CP® Nozzle), use field observations to assess the need for runoff prevention measures.

Distribution Patterns, Nozzle Spacing, and Height. Select a combination of sprinkler spacing, nozzle sizes, and operating pressures that provide the design application rate and a uniform distribution.

Use coefficient of uniformity (CU) data or distribution uniformity (DU) as defined in NRCS (1983) when selecting sprinkler spacing, nozzle size, and operating pressure.

Center Pivot and Linear Move Systems

For center pivot and linear move systems, select sprinkler spacing, nozzle height, and operating pressure to provide required CU. For center pivots, compute CU using the Heermann-Hein weighted area method. For linear systems, compute CU using equivalent unit areas (Christensen method). The minimum CU value for a pivot or linear move system is 85 percent (76% DU). Use Center Pivot Evaluation and Design (CPED) software, or other NRCS approved modeling software to estimate CU values when manufacturer provided CU information is not available. Limit nozzle spacing and pressures to within manufacturer's recommended ranges.

For center pivot and linear move systems with nozzles that operate in canopy for 50 percent or more of the growing season, nozzle spacing shall not exceed every other crop row or 80 inches maximum. Avoid placing nozzles at heights of high leaf concentration (e.g., avoid sprinkler height in corn near ear height, approximately 4 feet). Use nozzle heights higher or lower than high leaf concentration areas. Do not use in-canopy operation on narrow-and ultra-narrow row plantings.

Low Energy Precision Application (LEPA)

Do not exceed a nozzle spacing of 80 inches. Discharge water through a sock or hose dragged on the ground, or through a nozzle with a bubble shield or pad set at a uniform height of 18 inches or less.

LEPA systems are only applicable on crops planted with furrows or beds. LEPA systems shall have row patterns that match the lateral line movement (e.g., circular for center pivots and straight row for linear move). Do not irrigate tower wheel tracks. Eliminate runoff and water translocation under LEPA systems by appropriate methods such as furrow dikes, dammer dikes, implanted reservoirs, or residue management.

Fixed-Solid-set, Big Gun, Periodic Move, and Traveling Sprinkler Systems

For fixed-solid-set, big gun, and periodic move sprinkler systems, CU (or DU) data shall be used when selecting sprinkler spacing, nozzle size, and operating pressure. CU shall not be less than 75 percent (60% DU) for deep-rooted (4 feet or more) field and forage crops where fertilizers and pesticides are not applied through the system, and 85 percent (76% DU) for high-value or shallow-rooted crops and for any crop where fertilizer or pesticides are applied through the system. Comply with tables 1a and 1b if CU/DU data is not provided.

Table 1a. Maximum Spacing for Fixed Solid-set, Big Gun and Periodic Move Sprinklers with Rectangular Pattern

Sprinkler Classification & (Operating Pressure)	Average Wind Velocity (mph)	Lateral Spacing (percent)*	Sprinkler Spacing (percent)*
Low (2–35 psi), Moderate (35–50 psi), Medium (50–75 psi)	0 to 1	65	50
	1 to 5	60	50
	5 to 10	50	50
	> 10	45	50
	Average Wind Velocity (mph)	Maximum diagonal distance between sprinkler locations on adjacent laterals (percent)*	
High (> 75 psi)	0 to 4	65	
	4 to 10	50	
	> 10	30	

*Percent of wetted diameter when operating at design pressure based on manufacturer's performance tables

Table 1b. Maximum Spacing for Fixed Solid-set, Big Gun and Periodic Move Sprinklers with Triangular Pattern

Sprinkler Classification & (Operating Pressure)	Average Wind Velocity (mph)	Lateral Spacing (percent)*	Sprinkler Spacing (percent)*
Low (2–35 psi), Moderate (35–50 psi), Medium (50–75 psi)	0 to 1	70	65
	1 to 5	65	65
	5 to 10	54	65
	> 10	48	65

*Percent of wetted diameter when operating at design pressure based on manufacturer's performance tables

For traveling sprinkler irrigation systems use table 2 for towpath spacing.

Table 2 - Towpath Spacing for Traveling Sprinkler Systems (expressed as percent of wetted diameter*).

Average Wind Velocity (mph)	Ring Nozzle	Tapered Nozzle
0 to 1	80	80
1 to 6	70	75
6 to 10	60	65
> 10 **	50	55

* Because the distribution pattern of traveling systems is seriously affected by wind, operation in winds greater than 10 mph is not recommended.

Land Slope. Field slope for a LEPA system shall not exceed 1percent on more than 50 percent of the field with a maximum slope of 3 percent. Field slopes for other center pivot or linear move systems with sprinklers on drops shall not exceed 3 percent on more than 50 percent of the field for fine and moderately fine soils, as described in the National Engineering Handbook, Part 652, National Irrigation Guide, Table 2-5. On coarser soils, analyze how runoff will be controlled on center pivot or linear move systems installed on slopes greater than 5 percent. Base the analysis on field observations or approved runoff models (e.g. CP® Nozzle).

Regardless of soil texture, field slopes shall not exceed 3 percent on more than 50 percent of the field or center pivot or linear move systems that operate sprinklers within the crop canopy for 50 percent or more of the growing season,

Maximum field slopes for center pivot or linear move systems shall not exceed manufacturer's slope limitations based on pivot profile, span length, pipe diameter, and tire size.

Pressure Regulators. In absence of manufacturer's recommendations for pressure regulator operation, ensure line pressure upstream of all regulators is at least 5 psi above rated regulator pressure.

Linear Move/Periodic Move Lateral Lines. Unless pressure reducers or regulators are installed at each outlet, or other pressure compensating or flow control devices are used, lateral lines shall be designed so that pressure variation along the lateral line does not exceed 20 percent (or 10% of design flow) of average design operating pressure.

Risers. Except for under-tree operation, place the riser pipes used on lateral lines high enough to prevent interference with the distribution pattern when irrigating the tallest crop. Riser heights shall not be less than shown in table 3.

Table 3 - Riser heights

Sprinkler discharge (gallons/minute)	Riser height* (inches)
Less than 10	6
10–25	9
25–50	12
50–120	18
More than 120	36

*Risers over 3 feet in height shall be anchored and stabilized.

Additional Criteria Applicable to Improve Plant Condition, Productivity, Health and Vigor

Design Capacity. As a minimum, use peak daily evapotranspiration for design capacity on sprinkler systems used for soil cooling.

Sprinkler systems used for foliar cooling, shall have sufficient capacity to satisfy the crop's evaporative demand on a minute-by-minute basis throughout peak use hours during peak use days.

The design capacity for systems used for cooling or frost protection shall be adequate to allow water application to the entire area simultaneously.

Design Application Rate. For frost protection base application rate on minimum air temperature, maximum anticipated wind speed and relative humidity. Design sprinkler system uniformity coefficient of not less than 85 percent. For undertree sprinkling, use design application rates in the range of 0.08 to 0.12 in/hr. For overtree sprinkling, use design application rates ≥ 0.15in/hr.

Additional Criteria Applicable to Prevent the Entry of Excessive Nutrients, Organics and Other Chemicals in Surface and Groundwater.

Comply with all Federal, State, and local laws, rules, and regulations regarding backflow and anti-siphon prevention measures on the installation and operation of a sprinkler system designed for the purpose of chemical, nutrient, or wastewater application. Protect surface waters from direct chemical, nutrient, or wastewater applications.

Locate injector (for chemical, fertilizer or pesticide) and other automatically operating equipment adjacent to the pump and power unit and installed in accordance with state regulations, or lacking the same, in compliance with manufacturer's recommendation. The chemical injection device shall be accurate to within 1 percent of maximum injection rates, and easily calibrated and adjustable for all chemicals and all injection rates.

Design sprinkler irrigation systems used to apply wastewater with inlet filtration or with sprinkler nozzles of sufficient size to prevent clogging. Chemicals, fertilizers, and liquid manure shall be applied in accordance with appropriate NRCS Practice Standards 590 (Nutrient Management), 595 (Pest Management), or any other applicable NRCS Practice Standard

Design Application Rate and Timing. Application rates shall follow label recommendations. Duration of chemical applications shall be the minimum length of time required to apply the chemicals and flush the pipelines.

Chemical application shall comply with runoff criteria set forth in Efficient and Uniform Application of Water on Irrigated Lands section.

Coefficient of Uniformity. Use distribution and uniformity requirements stated in criteria for Efficient and Uniform Application of Water on Irrigated Lands.

In sustained wind conditions exceeding 10 miles per hour, or in wind conditions exceeding product label directions, do not use sprinklers to apply chemicals, nutrients, or wastewater.

Additional Criteria Applicable to Improve Condition of Soil Contaminated With Salts and Other Chemicals.

Design Application Depth. Base design application depth on crop rooting and salinity tolerance thresholds (NRCS 1993).

Design Application Rate. Use application rates less than soil intake rates to prevent ponding and runoff. Use distribution and uniformity requirements stated in criteria for Efficient and Uniform Application of Water on Irrigated Lands.

Additional Criteria Applicable to Reduce Particulate Matter Emissions to Improve Air Quality

The installation and operation of sprinkler systems for confined animal pen dust control shall cover the majority of each pen area occupied by livestock (except for concrete feed bunk aprons and similar areas). The quality of applied water shall be fit for animal consumption.

Capacity and Application Depth. The sprinkler system shall have capacity and flexibility to apply the design application depth in a cycle of 3 days or less. Determine application depth requirements with an allowance for reasonable application losses.

The minimum design application amount shall equal the maximum total daily wet-soil evaporation, with allowances for moisture input to pen areas from animal manure and urine.

When used to suppress dust in confined animal pen areas, avoid over-application and excessive sprinkler overlap to minimize runoff, reduce odor, fly problems, and chronically wet areas.

Verify water supplies are adequate to meet other operating needs during sprinkler system operation.

Water Amendments. Sprinklers may apply chemical injectants labeled for dust suppression when the system has backflow prevention and anti-siphon devices.

When chemicals are applied through the sprinkler system, surface waters and livestock watering facilities shall be protected from direct application unless chemical labels indicate that direct application will not negatively impact human or animal health or water quality.

Distribution Patterns and Spacing. Spacing of sprinklers along laterals shall be between 50 and 75 percent of the wetted diameter listed in manufacturer's performance tables.

Spacing between laterals shall comply with the following criteria:

- For medium pressure sprinkler nozzles (50–75 psi), the spacing of laterals along the main line shall be between 70 and 90 percent of the wetted diameter.
- For high pressure sprinklers (>75 psi), the maximum distance between two sprinklers on adjacent lateral lines shall not exceed 100 percent of wetted diameter.

Risers. Construct risers in a manner that provides protection from corrosive soils, equipment damage, and livestock damage. Riser heights shall place the discharge sprinkler not less than 6 feet above ground surface. Anchor and stabilize risers.

System Valves and Controllers. Due to high application rates, variable operating conditions, and needed system flexibility and control, utilize an automated control system to ensure maximum operating efficiency of the sprinkler system. Equip systems with a rain sensor connected to the control system to prohibit system operation during rainfall events.

Because wind may affect water distribution patterns, equip the automated system controller with timer overrides that allow system to be operated manually during periods of calmer winds, such as evening, nighttime, and early morning. The operating system shall provide the flexibility to change sprinkling duration in 1-minute increments and have a minimum of 6 start times per day to provide for adjustment for climate conditions.

Utilize automatic valves for the automated control system to facilitate operation of individual sprinkler nozzles. The valves shall be of a size and quality consistent with standard engineering practice. Incorporate zone isolation valves on laterals to allow partial system operation during periods of maintenance and repair. Install pressure regulators, pressure compensating valves, or flow-control devices at each sprinkler outlet.

Minimize line drainage to the lowest sprinkler in areas of uneven or sloping terrain by incorporating a control valve or low-head drainage device at each sprinkler.

Additional Criteria Applicable to Reduce Energy Use

Provide an analysis that demonstrates reduction of energy use from practice implementation by documenting reduction in one or more of the following:

- pressure
- flow rate
- seasonal hours of operation
- application depth

Sprinkler operating pressure or flow rate reduction must translate to corresponding pumping plant discharge pressure or flow reduction.

The required analysis shall calculate energy reduction as the difference between average annual or seasonal energy uses compared to previous operating conditions.

CONSIDERATIONS

All Systems, General

For guidance on selecting design application efficiency, see NRCS (1983 and 1997).

Refer to NRCS (1993) for additional guidance on using sprinkler irrigation systems for temperature control, and chemigation.

Use of pressure regulators on a sprinkler system increases pumping cost because increased operating pressures are required upstream of each regulator/nozzle to overcome losses through the regulator, typically assumed to be 5 psi.

Beneficial effects of conservation practices applied to limit translocation and runoff may diminish over the irrigation season.

Systems designed to operate with multi-day irrigation sets should consider varied time increments or set times to balance effects of day and night temperature and wind patterns.

Filter or screen irrigation water before it enters the system if it contains particulate matter, algae, or other material that could plug sprinkler nozzles.

This practice and/or associated practices may include placement of fill material, the clearing of trees, and/or the construction of ditches or subsurface drainage pipes in low lying and floodplain type situations. The placement of fill material, the clearing of trees, and/or the installation of new ditches or drainage tiles in areas that are potentially wetlands may be a violation of the Swampbuster portion of the Food Security

Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Tennessee State Water Quality Control Act. All of these areas should be evaluated for wetland potential thoroughly prior to implementation of this practice and/or other associated practices.

Wastewater Application

To avoid sprinkler plugging and reduce system design operating pressure when applying wastewater, solids should be removed by use of solid separators, screens, filters, two-stage lagoons or waste-holding ponds, or similar methods.

The use of wastewater may reduce system life due to corrosion or abrasion. If fresh water is available the system should be flushed after use.

Pivot/Linear-Move

Computation of the effective irrigated area of the system should be based on a system radius from pad to the last sprinkler plus 75 to 80 percent of wetted radius of last sprinkler or end gun.

System effective irrigated area computations should be based on a system radius from pad to the last sprinkler plus 75 to 80 percent of wetted radius of last sprinkler or end gun.

Elevation changes in the field have more impact on systems with lower system design pressures.

Consider using pressure regulators even on relatively level ground if the system flow rate fluctuates significantly due to variable inlet water surface elevation or other reasons (e.g. corner systems or end guns).

Light frequent applications can reduce runoff problems but may increase soil-surface evaporation.

Use nozzle offsets or booms to reduce peak application rates and tower wheel track rutting.

Keller and Bliesner (2000) recommended end-gun wetted sector angle settings of 135 degrees (L90, R45) for guns operated only in corners, and 150 degrees (L105, R45) for smaller end guns continuously operated.

In order to conserve energy on pivot/lateral move systems consider using an end gun booster pump in lieu of providing increased pressure to the entire system.

Cyclic on/off operation of center pivot corner arm units and end guns impact system performance and application uniformity. A large end gun may reduce the average CU by 1 percent for each 1 percent of area covered past the main system hardware. Impact of transition speed and dual operating characteristics will impact pumping plant performance; and can impact water supply and delivery system performance.

Flexible drop tubes should be installed alternately on both sides of pivot/linear-move span pipe when used in-crop. Flexible drops should be weighted or secured in windy areas.

Center pivots and linear-move systems that are full of water will cause deflection in the span pipes and towers. Consider deflection amount when determining drop lengths and nozzle heights. Any wheel track rutting depth will also affect nozzle height. When the system is full of water, all nozzles installed on drops should be at same relative height along the lateral.

Nozzles discharges on center pivot or linear move systems, can be diverted away from wheel tracks to reduce rutting.

Traveler Systems

Reduce reel hose length to only what is needed for the longest field. Standard supplied hose lengths are often longer than needed. The additional length reduces pressure for every application and wastes energy.

Solid Set and Periodic Hand Move

Consider limiting pressure loss in laterals to a maximum of 10 percent of the operating pressure to improve water distribution uniformity.

Particulate Matter Emissions Reduction

Scraping and removing manure between operations may reduce the amount of dust control needed. As a stand-alone practice, this may be sufficient to eliminate the need for sprinklers. For more information, see NRCS CPS Code 375, Dust Control from Animal Activity on Open Lot Surfaces.

Open-lot management practices can be applied that include scraping and removing manure in pens between occupations, and shaping of the holding areas to prevent ponding water and chronically wet areas.

Riser pipes used in lateral lines shall be high enough to minimize interference from surrounding structures.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for constructing sprinkler systems describe the requirements for properly installing the practice to achieve its intended purpose. As a minimum, plans shall include:

- Plan map showing location of system, application area, elevations, north arrow, and scale
- System design pressure and flow rate
- Sprinkler location, type, nozzle size, operating pressure, and flow rate
- Appurtenance location, type, size and installation requirements

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An operation and maintenance plan must provide specific instructions for operating and maintaining the system to ensure that it functions properly throughout its expected lifespan. It should also provide information regarding periodic inspections and prompt repair or replacement of damaged components. Disconnect electrical service and check for stray voltage before servicing or retrofitting any electrical equipment.

The plan, as a minimum, shall address the following:

- Periodic check and removal of debris and sediment as necessary from nozzles to assure proper operation
- Inspection or testing of pipeline and pumping plant components and appurtenances, as applicable
- Regular testing of pressures and flow rates to assure proper operation
- Periodic checks of nozzles and spray heads for proper operation and wear
- Routine maintenance of mechanical components in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations

Additional information regarding operation of the system will be included in the Irrigation Water Management Plan, Waste Recycling Plan and/or Nutrient Management Plan, Pest Management Plan, or Salinity Management/Reclamation Plan, as applicable for the practice purpose.

REFERENCES:

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