

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN

Geotextile Filters  
and  
Prefabricated  
Drainage  
Geocomposites

SHOBHA K. BHATIA AND L. DAVID SUITS, EDITORS

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***Recent Developments in Geotextile  
Filters and Prefabricated Drainage  
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## Foreword

This publication, *Recent Developments in Geotextile Filters and Prefabricated Drainage Geocomposites*, contains papers presented at the symposium of the same name held in Denver, Colorado on 20 June 1995. The symposium was sponsored by ASTM Committee D-35 on Geosynthetics. Shobha K. Bhatia of Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York and L. David Suits of the New York State Department of Transportation in Albany, New York presided as symposium chairmen and are editors of the resulting publication.

# Contents

**Overview**—S. BHATIA AND L. D. SUITS vii

## PORE SIZE CHARACTERIZATION AND PERMEABILITY

**Evaluating Geotextile Pore Structure**—G. R. FISCHER, R. D. HOLTZ, AND  
B. R. CHRISTOPHER 3

**Determination of the Pore Size Distribution of Nonwoven Geotextiles by a  
Modified Capillary Flow Porometry Technique**—O. G. VERMEERSCH AND  
J. MLYNAREK 19

**Determination and Comparisons of the Pore Structure of Nonwoven  
Geotextiles**—A. H. ELSHARIEF AND C. W. LOVELL 35

**Wet Sieving as a European EN-Standard for Determining the Characteristic  
Opening Size of Geotextiles**—W. DIERICKX AND B. MYLES 54

**Determination of Water Penetration Resistance of Geotextiles**—W. DIERICKX 65

**Permeameter Research to Evaluate Geotextile Performance**—W. DIERICKX 75

## APPLICATIONS

**An Empirical Approach to Filtration Criteria for Non-Woven Geotextiles**—  
Y. M. CHIN AND H. R. NIKRAZ 87

**A Modified Gradient Ratio Test Device**—R. J. FANNIN, Y. P. VAID, E. M. PALMEIRA,  
AND Y. C. SHI 100

**Significance of Gradient Ratio Test for Determining Clogging Potential of  
Geotextiles**—D. T.-T. CHANG AND Y. C. NIEH 113

**Geotextile Filter Design Critique**—R. F. WILSON-FAHMY, G. R. KOERNER, AND  
R. M. KOERNER 132

## CASE HISTORIES

**Field Performance of Geotextile Highway Drainage Systems**—G. R. KOERNER,  
R. M. KOERNER, AND R. F. WILSON-FAHMY 165

**Evaluation of Geotextile Filter in a Collection System at Fresh Kills  
Landfill**—B. W. CORCORAN AND S. K. BHATIA 182

<b>Use of Geosynthetics in the Uplift Pressure Relief System for a Raft Foundation—D. T.-T. CHANG, J. Y. WU, AND Y.-C. NIEH</b>	196
<b>Behavior of Nonwoven Geotextiles Under Pumping Loads—J. LAFLEUR, M. ASSI, AND J. MLYNAREK</b>	211
<b>Evaluation of Pre-1994 Ontario Highway Edge Drain Practice—G. P. RAYMOND, R. J. BATHURST, AND J. HAJEK</b>	222

# Overview

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Geosynthetics play a pivotal role in providing filtration and drainage in geotechnical engineering applications. Many woven and nonwoven geotextiles provide filtration, while nonwoven geotextiles, geonets, and prefabricated drainage composites provide drainage. The design of geotextile filters incorporates a balance between larger pore openings for adequate permeability of the geotextiles and smaller pore openings for proper soil retention by the geotextile.

Sharing of information on geotextile filters and prefabricated geocomposites was the purpose of the symposium. The three sections of this special technical publication (STP) focus on the topics of the papers presented at the symposium. The sections are: Pore Size Characterization and Permeability, Applications, and Case Histories. A brief summary of the main points of the papers in each section follows.

In the section on Pore Size Characterization and Permeability, the authors discuss various techniques for the characterization of the pore opening size and distribution for various geotextiles. While several methods are presented, there appears not to be a clear cut conclusion as to which method provides the “true” pore size characterization across the board.

The effectiveness of a geotextile filter is a function of the granularity of the soil being protected by the filter, hydraulic conditions, and the geometry of the pore network or pore size distribution of the geotextile filter. However, the influence of the pore size distribution of the geotextile on the soil/geotextile filtration behavior is not fully understood.

Procedures for determining the largest pore opening size are well established, yet still under debate. Numerous design criteria continue to use the largest opening size ( $O_{95}$  or  $O_{90}$ ) despite observations by many researchers that the largest opening size is not indicative of the filtration phenomena of soil/geotextile systems. These observations are based on the amount of soil passing and the clogging of the geotextile. The continued use of the largest opening size in the design criteria has been justified by the fact that no reasonable and reliable technique exists that can be used to evaluate complete pore size distribution.

While this justification was valid 15 years ago, significant advances in attaining the pore size distribution of a geotextile have been made over that time period. Depending on the test method used, four different categories of pore sizes and distributions can be obtained. It is important to note that each method provides pore sizes and distributions that are not necessarily a unique property of the geotextile, but rather the method of measurement. Therefore, it is critical to select a method that represents the pore sizes of geotextiles as related to filtration behavior.

The various methods discussed in the papers in this section can be grouped into three categories: sieving pore size, numerical pore size, and volumetric pore size. The sieving pore size is based on the probability of a particle of a certain diameter passing through an opening during a certain duration of shaking (in either the wet or dry condition) or cycles of immersion. The dry, wet, and hydrodynamic sieving methods are the established methods that were designed to determine the largest opening size of the geotextile. One paper presented in this section compared the dry, wet, and hydrodynamic sieving test results.

Several European countries participated in this study. The study resulted in the wet sieving method being recommended as the European standard. It was pointed out in other papers that pore sizes obtained from sieving methods depend on the pore channel constriction size. However, there is not a clear understanding of this fact. In addition, sieving methods cannot provide the geotextile pore size distribution.

Numerical pore size methods are based on counting the number of pores and sizes of pore constrictions in a geotextile. The methods that fall into this category are image analysis and the minimum bubble pressure technique. Two papers included in this section used the image analysis technique to measure the pore size distribution of nonwoven geotextiles. Image analysis results presented in one of the papers indicate that the thickness of the geotextile has an insignificant influence on the pore size distribution of geotextiles from the same manufacturer. In this paper the authors also found that the  $O_{95}$  values from the image analysis were much higher than the results of wet or hydrodynamic sieving. The authors did point out that such a comparison has no logic since sieving results are influenced by surface porosity, thickness, and other structural properties of the geotextile; whereas the image analysis results are a function of pore spaces and pore volume in the geotextile. In the second paper referred to above, the authors evaluated the pore size distribution of nonwoven geotextiles under different compressive pressures using the image analysis technique. They observed a trend of decreasing pore size distribution with increasing compressive pressures.

Several authors found the image analysis technique to be difficult and expensive to perform. It was pointed out that this method can only measure a pore size at a particular location within the pore channel, and therefore does not take into account the shape of the pore channel and porosity.

Volumetric pore size methods are based on the percentage of total pore volume occupied by each pore size. These methods provide no information regarding the number of pores and pore constrictions. Papers presented on this topic discussed two different methods. They were the mercury intrusion method and the capillary flow porometry method. In mercury intrusion, mercury is intruded into the geotextile from all sides; whereas the capillary flow method, also called bubble point method, air and non-wetting liquid are extruded, one-way, through the geotextile by creating a pressure gradient across the thickness of the geotextile. Thus, one method is an intrusion method, and the other is an extrusion method. In the mercury intrusion test, all free volume is measured, but not the volume specifically available for flow. In the capillary flow method, a modified porosity is obtained because of the one-way flow of liquid out of the geotextile. Thus the voids associated with flow through the geotextile are measured. In this paper, the authors described in detail the differences between the mercury intrusion and capillary flow methods. They concluded that the mercury intrusion method probably provides the largest pore size distribution because of its multidirectional intrusion procedure, while the capillary flow method gives the smaller pore size distribution because it measures constriction size. This conclusion can be verified by comparative results by other investigators, such as work done at Syracuse University.

Pore size distribution results using the bubble point technique were presented for several nonwoven geotextiles in one paper. It was pointed out that the measured opening sizes ( $O_{95}$  and  $O_{50}$ ) were significantly influenced by the pressure supply. The measured opening sizes increased with increasing pressure supply, thus indicating the measured pore openings are a function of the testing procedure.

In general, a consensus exists that the capillary flow porometry method is a simple and rapid method for the measurement of the pore size distribution of geotextiles. Further, it was pointed out that the volumetric distribution obtained from this method is more meaningful because it allows an evaluation of the pore constriction size distribution. It was also pointed

out that the size of the pore constrictions that determines whether a soil particle will pass through the geotextile. It should be pointed out that capillary flow porometry is not free from limitations, and additional work is needed before these limitations are removed. In addition, unless it is shown that a complete pore size distribution of geotextiles is critical in retention and clogging performance, designers will continue to use the largest pore openings measured from sieving methods.

Papers presented in the Applications section present reviews of current geotextile filter design methods. Included in the papers are suggested improvements to existing design methods. These include the proposal of a new test, modification of the current gradient ratio test, and a proposed empirical approach to the design process.

Presented in one paper is an empirical method of computing the gradient ratio of a soil/geotextile system. Basis for the method is the opening size distribution of the geotextile and particle size distribution and Atterburg limits of the soil. Hydrodynamic sieving and image analysis established the opening size distribution. Results of long-term gradient ratio tests were used in developing the empirical relationships for the proposed technique. Testing and analysis has not been completed. However, preliminary results show a moderate to high degree of association between the proposed empirical approach and the long-term gradient ratio compatibility tests run.

In another paper, a modified gradient ratio test is presented. The paper reports that limitations in the current test method and device hinder the test being used to its fullest potential. These limitations result in an incomplete representation of the conditions existing in the field following installation of the geotextile. Objectives of the proposed modifications include: testing at targeted normal stresses, more control of the flow regime, and better monitoring of any piping that may take place during test preparation and performance. Results of preliminary testing done at the University of British Columbia show that normal stress has an insignificant influence and that most soil particles pass during sample preparation. The latter has important implications when interpreting piping failures in soil/geotextile systems.

As part of a National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) project, exhumation of geotextiles or geocomposite drains from 91 sites throughout the United States took place. The findings of this study resulted in a critique of the various geotextile filter design methods currently in use. Results of the study are presented in the Case History section. An analysis is made here as to the relationship the findings have to the various design guidelines. The results of the study show the current Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines for filter design to be suitable. However, the authors do recommend the use of either a proposed long-term flow test or the hydraulic conductivity test rather than the gradient ratio test.

Papers presented in the Case History section describe the performance of geotextiles in highway, landfill, and building foundation drainage installations. The papers detail design procedures followed in the projects reported on. Recommendations for improved design procedures resulted from the various studies.

The three-year NCHRP project referred to previously consisted of exhuming samples from various types of geosynthetic drainage systems on 91 different field sites in 17 different states throughout the United States. Sites included drainage systems of prefabricated geocomposite underdrains, geotextile wrapped underdrains, perforated pipe underdrains, and geotextile socked perforated pipe. There were some geotextile wall drains and geotextile erosion control filters exhumed also. The age of the sites ranged from less than two to sixteen years old. Materials exhumed at each site were examined and tested in the laboratory to evaluate their condition and performance. The basic conclusion reached

from the study was that there needs to be more attention paid to installation and maintenance techniques for each system.

A study of the performance of a geotextile filter in a landfill system in New York City evaluated the impacts of burial and filtration of leachate on the hydraulic and mechanical properties of the geotextile. Evaluation of the weight, grab strength, elongation, and permittivity of the exhumed samples of the geotextile provided the basis for the study. Microscopic evaluation of samples helped to decide the extent of clogging occurring in the geotextile. The investigation showed approximately an order of magnitude decrease in permittivity. This, however, was not detrimental to the performance of the filter. Results of the other index property tests showed them to be very similar to the initial values for the material. The observations also showed no biological clogging.

Performance of a pressure relief system using a geotextile, geonet, and geogrid in constructing a combination office building apartment complex in Taipei, Taiwan showed it to be a cost-effective solution to hydrostatic uplift pressure problems. Design of the system had to meet filtration and drainage criteria that would allow transfer of water, retention of soil, and free movement of water under the foundation load. Monitoring of the site showed significant differences in pore pressure dissipation in the areas where the system was installed versus the areas where there was no system. The results of the field monitoring were in reasonable agreement with expected values.

Geotextiles used in the drainage and filtration applications in highways are subjected to cyclic loading. In fine grade soils, this results in fines being pumped into the geotextiles. Dynamic consolidation testing done at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal, Canada, simulated the action of the pumping loads experienced in the field. The entrapment of soil particles in the geotextiles reduced the porosity. However, it was felt that there was no significant effect on the permeability of the material. The filtration opening size of the geotextile  $O_{95}$  as determined by hydrodynamic sieving, is an adequate indicator of the geotextile's soil retention potential under dynamic loads.

A research contract between the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), Ontario, and Queen's University resulted in revised pavement edge-drain design techniques for the MTO. Four types of edge drains were evaluated. They included a geotextile sock-wrapped pipe with clay subgrade, a geocomposite edge drain with clay subgrade, a geotextile-wrapped open-graded aggregate drain with a clayey gravel subgrade, and geocomposite edge drain with a sand subgrade. The revised design includes placing the edge drain beneath the pavement rather than beyond the pavement edge. The author's also recommend that the drainage conduit be placed either on the shoulder side or center of the excavated trench. The trench should then be backfilled with clean sand. These last two findings agree with similar research conducted in the United States.

In the past 15 years, significant progress has been made in the understanding of filtration and drainage behavior of geosynthetics such as nonwoven geotextiles and prefabricated drainage composites. It is recognized that pore size characterization of nonwoven geotextiles is important for their filtration performance. Significant effort has been focused on attaining pore size distribution of nonwoven geotextiles. In general, a consensus exists that the capillary flow porometry is the best method among available methods. However, this method needs further modification before it can become a standard for evaluating pore size distribution.

This overview presents a brief review of the papers presented in this STP. The papers include case histories of field experience of the performance of drainage geosynthetics, along with papers on laboratory and theoretical research carried out in an effort to better understand and characterize their performance. Recommendations are made for improved design procedures and improved installation techniques. While there is still much work to be

done in understanding the filtration process, it is felt that these recommendations will help ensure the desired performance of drainage geosynthetics.

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