

Subcontractors learn about erosion control

Organization teams with county to teach methods at construction sites

BY ED MARCUM

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It's OK for a flag to flutter in the wind, but not the fabric in a silt fence.

If you see a building site where the silt fences are sagging or rippling in the wind, you can bet they are not doing their job as a barrier against soil erosion. They need to be taut, said Ruth Anne Hanahan, education and outreach coordinator with the Water Quality Forum.

Her organization is teaming with the Knox County Stormwater Management Division on a program to educate building subcontractors on the importance of maintaining erosion control measures at construction sites.

Members of the water quality group, county officials and AmeriCorps Volunteers gathered Friday at a building site in West Arden subdivision off George Williams Road to guide workers through a

tutorial on silt fences and other soil erosion barriers.

Bob Mohny, president of Saddlebrook, the subdivision's developer, said his company wants to stay in the forefront on "green" building methods and wants contractors working on Saddlebrook projects to meet the same standards.

"Green building includes more than just the actual building of the home," Mohny said. "It includes the environment and impact on the environment, and obviously sediment and soil control is very important in East Tennessee, and we want to be a leader in it."

When he found out about the Water Quality Forum program, he invited those involved to lead a two-hour session for subcontractors in West Arden. Posters were mounted on easels to show proper and improper ways of installing silt fences, storm-water drain barriers and other erosion-control features. Viewers could lift a flap to reveal which

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Ruth Anne Hanahan, education and outreach coordinator with the Water Quality Forum, explains how an "eel" — the object at her feet — is used to build barriers to keep soil from washing into storm drains.

photos showed the correct methods. Instructions were in English and Spanish because of the many Spanish-speaking workers employed by subcontractors.

The idea is that Saddlebrook employees have been drilled on the proper methods, but workers for a plumbing company or electrical company, for example, would not always know about silt fences or "eels," which are long sandbag-like barriers used to protect storm drains from sediment runoff.

"All our employees have been trained in new standards of silt control, but subcontractors are on the site more than anybody else," Mohny said. "We've tried to express to them how important this is, but they need to understand why we are doing it, how we are doing it and how important it is to protect our communities when they are in here through sediment control."

Mark Leach, director of construction for Saddlebrook, said a subcontractor otherwise might inadvertently cause problems.

"Say you've got a delivery guy with a truckload of trusses. If he doesn't know that silt fence is there for a reason — 'OK, I'll just back over it and dump my stuff on top of it,'" Leach said.

The hope is that subcontractors will avoid doing such things, plus be educated to spot and report erosion problems they see on job sites, he said. The scope of



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Knox County Watershed Coordinator Roy Arthur hands out oil rags with a printed environmental message to Kevin Sparks, center, and Nathan Smith, both with AVS Design Concepts, one of the subcontractors working with Saddlebrook in developing West Arden subdivision. The two men had just finished a tutorial on erosion control methods, and Sparks said he agrees with Saddlebrook's goals of better erosion control during its projects.

Saddlebrook's operations makes this important, he said.

"With 14 active subdivisions (under construction), there would be about 1,000 people there on a good work day," he said.

Hanahan said some of the impetus for the program came from Knox County. Parci Gibson, with the Stormwater Management Division, said getting better adherence to erosion-control standards at construction sites can help the county better meet state and federal mandates to protect rivers and streams. Saddlebrook is the second developer that the county

and the Water Quality Forum has worked with to educate its contractors, Hanahan said. The first sessions were held at two different subdivision sites under construction by Worley Builders Inc., she said.

The goal is to extend the program to other developers, Hanahan said. Those interested may reach her at 865-974-9124. The Water Quality Forum has a Web site at www.waterqualityforum.org.

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