Proper Sandbagging Method

Sandbagging - it is more than fill 'em up, stack 'em, and build a wall!

The use of sandbags is a simple, but effective way to prevent or reduce flood water damage. Properly filled and placed sandbags can act as a barrier to divert moving water around instead of through buildings. Sandbag construction does not, however, guarantee a water tight seal.

The most commonly used bags are untreated burlap sacks available at feed or hardware stores. Empty bags can be stockpiled for several years if properly stored. Filled bags of earth material will deteriorate quickly.

A heavy bodied or sandy soil is most desirable for filling sandbags, but any usable material at or near the site has definite advantages. Fine sand could leak out through the weave in the bag. To prevent this, double bag the material. Gravelly or rocky soils are generally poor choices because of their permeability characteristic.

Sandbag barriers can easily be constructed by two people, as most individuals have the physical capabilities to carry or drag a sandbag weighing around 30 pounds.

Fill Sandbags

Filling Sandbags is a two-person operation. One member of the team places the empty bag between or slightly in front of widespread feet with arms extended. The throat of the bag is folded to form a collar and held with the hands in position. The other team member carefully empties a rounded shovel full of material into the open end. The person holding the sack should be standing with knees slightly flexed and head and face as far away from the action of the shovel as practical. The use of safety goggles and gloves is desirable and sometimes necessary.

Placing Sandbags

- Remove any debris from the area where bags are to be placed.
- Place the half-filled bags lengthwise and parallel to the direction of water flow.
- If tied bags are used, flatten them and flare the tied end. If untied bags are used, fold the open end to form a triangle.
- Place succeeding bags on the folded or flared portion of the previous bag and stamp into place to eliminate gaps and to form a tight seal.
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- Stagger the joint connections when multiple layers are necessary.

If you were asked to help sandbags, would you know how?

Which is the correctly filled sandbag and why?

Bag a is correctly filled because it is 1/2 to 2/3 full, tied or folded high, and would weight about 35 to 40 lbs.. When stacked, it will lie flat and "mold" into place, making a more leak-proof barrier. Bag b is incorrectly filled because it is filled too full, would not lay flat or "mold into place, and is too heavy to easily handle. Bag c is also incorrectly filled even though it is filled from 1/2 to 2/3 full, it is tied or folded too low and would not lie flat or "mold" into place.

Idaho Bureau of Disaster Services