



Rain and a muddy footprint: recipe for a sleepless night

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Biography:

Sarah started in the civil construction industry in 2011 as a Graduate Environmental Advisor after completing a B. Environmental Science and B. Applied Science (Hons) at the University of Canberra. Sarah has continued in the industry in environmental, sustainability and community roles. Sarah has worked in NSW, the ACT and QLD on a variety of large-scale infrastructure projects including the construction of motorways, tunnels and a dam. Each project, with its unique environment, has provided erosion control challenges such as recovering from floods, working in a tidal zone, constrained urban catchments and rugged terrain.

Sarah is currently the Environment and Community Manager of a rail upgrade project in the Blue Mountains.

In 2018 Sarah received the IECA Australasia Chapter Young Professional Scholarship which has provided her with an opportunity to attend the 2018 and 2019 conferences and gain an insight into the inner workings of IECA.

Abstract:

Before I entered the industry, I was warned that I would lose sleep on rainy nights worrying about how the site would hold up. I laughed it off. Not long into my career it became a reality. Rain became the unrivalled tormentor.

No matter how many times we check the rain forecast we cannot control the weather, however, there are many factors we can influence leading up to a rain event. We have influence over the controls installed, the resources used and even stakeholder perceptions of risk.

Over time, my sleep has improved because experience has helped fine-tune rain preparation and has shaped my perspective on risk. At the same time, my changed perspective has made me more aware of the role erosion controls play in the big picture. The risk is no longer limited to the area on either side of the project boundary, but it's about the wider environment. How does erosion and the controls we install affect other aspects of the environment?

If the purpose of an erosion control is to improve the environment we need to consider whether that control does more harm than good over the course of its life, from manufacture to transport to installation to disposal. The benefit of the control needs to outweigh its footprint.

The short-term action is to ensure all controls serve a functional purpose, are installed correctly and maintained regularly. This will improve the standard of controls while reducing waste. It sounds easy, doesn't it?

The longer-term goal is to develop and adopt renewable and biodegradable products. This can be driven by making supply chains more transparent and encouraging innovation.

We can't control the rain but we can influence the future of the industry to avoid a muddy footprint. We need to influence the direction of the industry towards sustainable goals by collaborating with regulators, clients, suppliers, contractors, consultants and other industry bodies.

This presentation will explore the challenges and opportunities for becoming more sustainable from a site and industry scale.

Will you sleep better at night knowing you have a part to play?