

Coconut fiber is an underlying cause of hill fire?

By Hinson Lau

Hill fire can be a serious disaster, which destroys natural vegetation, ruins natural ecology and even costs human lives and properties. Currently, there are some misunderstandings that erosion control mats made of coconut fiber is an underlying cause of hill fire. However, it shall be known that coconut fiber is the scapegoat as the number one cause of hill fire, the real one is human carelessness.

EROSION CONTROL MAT MADE OF COCONUT COIR

Coir mesh is a common erosion control mat made of 100% coconut fiber. This erosion control mat is widely used in Hong Kong, the USA and Western Europe as it is proven to be an effective measure to control the washout of topsoil and minimize the chance of steep slope landslide.

As reviewed in the Bioengineering Congress in 1994, Coir offers the following benefits:

1. With high tensile strength, the coconut fiber protects steep surfaces from heavy flows and debris movement.
2. Its longevity of five to ten years allows plant and soil establishment and land stabilization
3. It is 100% biodegradable that serves as a soil amendment.
4. It is a water absorbent fiber that acts as mulch on the surface and as a wick in

the soil mantle.

5. It provides an excellent microclimate for plant establishment and balance healthy growth.
6. Coir re-vegetation encourages the restoration of terrestrial and aquatic riparian habitat.
7. Coir is environmentally responsible and aesthetically pleasing.

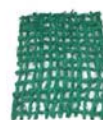


Figure 1: Coir Mesh

COIR IS A WATER ABSORBENT FIBER

A test of Coir Mesh under ASTM standards revealed that Coir Mesh has a high water absorption capacity. Thus, it is obvious that Coir Mesh neither is fire inducers nor catches fire easily. It is groundless that the application of Coir Mesh is an underlying cause of hill fire. Rather, it helps to provide and keep vegetation moisture and minimize the chance of hill fire caused by the dry weather.

HUMAN CARELESSNESS IS THE MAIN CAUSE OF HILL FIRE

Human carelessness is the main cause of hill fire in Hong Kong. In most of the cases, hill fire is caused by a small piece of cigarette buff left by careless or inconsiderate hikers. Therefore, be a careful and considerate citizen to minimize the chances of hill fire.