

Part 506 – Technical Materials

506.0 General

NRCS develops and maintains national conservation engineering technical materials, including documents, drawings, and computer programs to reflect NRCS technical expertise, experience, and procedures in engineering, geology, and landscape architecture. Most of these engineering materials serve as permanent references for providing technical assistance across the range of agency programs. Other engineering materials provide information to the public on agency projects and practices.

506.1 Definitions

- A. Conservation Practice.—A specific treatment, such as a structural measure, vegetative measure, or management technique, commonly used to meet specific needs in planning and conservation for which NRCS developed standards and specifications.
- B. Conservation Practice Specification.—A general or site-specific document that establishes the technical details and workmanship required to install a practice in accordance with the practice standard.
- C. Conservation Practice Standard.—A set of statements (criteria) that establish the minimum acceptable level of quality for planning, designing, constructing, operating, and maintaining conservation practices.
- D. Criteria.—Policy statements of specific quantitative technical requirements. Criteria may contain reference to procedures. As policy statements, criteria are, by definition, a subset of policy.
- E. Guide.—A compendium of information or series of options that does not recommend a specific course of action.
- F. Policy.—A statement of an adopted and definitive course of action.
- G. Procedure.—A method of analysis that can be either a technical or an administrative process methodology. Procedures contain a series of steps taken to determine a result for a desired objective.
- H. Specification.—An explicit set of requirements to be satisfied by a material, product, system, or service, such as construction. Specifications also identify the methods for determining whether each of the requirements is satisfied.
- I. Standard.—A statement of acceptable quality or technical excellence in terms of both form and function (performance), usually expressed in terms of limits (i.e., minimum or maximum).

506.2 Organization of Permanent Materials

- A. NRCS utilizes an agencywide-coordinated system to organize, issue, and manage its permanent documents. Title 120, General Manual (GM), Part 403, “Directives, Forms, and Reports,” and Title 120, National Directives Management Manual, Part 503, detail this system. NRCS incorporates legacy engineering policy and guidance documents into the agencywide directives system upon revision.
- B. Within the directives system, NRCS organizes all permanent national engineering materials under title 210 using a wide variety of directive types and formats, including National Engineering Handbook (NEH) sections, technical releases, design notes, and others. The following represents those most commonly used:

Title 210 – National Engineering Manual

- (1) General Manual (GM).—The GM contains policy that applies to all offices. 450-GM, “Technology,” contains additional policies applicable to engineering.
- (2) National Engineering Manual (NEM).—The NEM contains national policy for engineering work.
- (3) National Engineering Handbook (NEH).—The NEH contains detailed how-to instructions (i.e., procedures, guides, and specifications). NEH provides a uniform framework for locating technical references, eliminating duplication of distributed materials, and managing the development of new materials.
- (4) National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP).—The NHCP contains national conservation practice standards and specifications. The material within the NHCP is agency policy and criteria by cross-reference in the GM. The NHCP falls within title 450.
- (5) National Instructions (NI).—NHQ uses national instructions to issue detailed instructions and procedures on a specific subject to State offices.
- (6) Circulars.—Circulars are used to transmit critical changes and revisions to permanent directives (manuals, handbooks, and national instructions) when there is insufficient time or information available for complete revisions. NRCS does not post circulars to eDirectives, but distributes them directly.
- (7) Engineering Technical Notes (TN).—Engineering technical notes transmit technical and procedural information not suitable for supplementation to or creation of a manual or handbook. Typically, this information is narrow in scope and transmits experimental or developmental materials, such as research and field trials.
- (8) Engineering Technical Releases (TR).—NRCS issues technical releases only within Title 210, “Engineering.” TRs primarily contain procedures and technical information.
- (9) User Guides.—User guides provide specific instructions on the use and operation of NRCS-created and supported software applications and databases. NRCS also issues user guides for software developed outside of NRCS, but made available for NRCS users through the common computer environment (CCE) certification process.

506.3 Reserved

506.4 Developing NEH Materials

Based upon input from the State conservation engineers, the Engineering Business Area Advisory Group (EBAAG), engineering discipline leads, and others, the Director, Conservation Engineering Division (CED), approves development of national technical materials focused on agency priority needs. The director engages appropriate discipline leads and staff to coordinate development of materials, to scope the final product, and to ensure organized integration into NEH.

506.5 Distribution of Engineering Technical Materials within NRCS

NRCS distributes engineering technical publications in electronic form through the NRCS eDirectives System at <https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov>. NRCS provides notification of the posting of new and updated technical materials on the NRCS eDirectives site.

506.6 Distribution of Engineering Technical Materials Outside of NRCS

NRCS offices at all levels respond to requests for engineering technical materials from non-NRCS individuals or organizations. Some documents, such as the NEH, are quite large; and it is unreasonable to fill a request for printed NEH materials due to the time and expense involved in printing individual copies when the entire document is available through eDirectives.

Title 210 – National Engineering Manual

- (1) Refer requestors to the materials available on the NRCS eDirectives site.
- (2) At the discretion of the State conservation engineer, fill requests for printed copies from Federal, State, and local agencies, individuals working with NRCS in a professional capacity, contractors working with NRCS, and others involved with NRCS programs and contracts.