

Part 542 – Specifications

Subpart A – Construction Specifications

542.0 General

- A. NRCS uses standard construction specifications as a tool to ensure consistency and efficiency with the many contracts administered through various programs.
- B. Specifications are the written portion of the contract documents that convey the requirements for materials, equipment, systems, standards, workmanship for the project, and performance of related services. The national standard specifications must be supplemented for specific projects. The content of the standard specifications will be developed and maintained in a manner that ensures adherence to State laws and NRCS regulations and prevents conflict with other contract provisions. The national specifications can be found in Title 210, National Engineering Handbook (NEH), Part 642, on the eDirectives Web site.
- C. Generally, specifications take precedence over the construction drawings in claims or disputes. Equal attention must be given to both when developing suitable site-unique drawings and project-unique specifications.

542.1 Scope

- A. Specifications must be developed as outlined in 210-NEH, Part 642, “Specifications for Construction Contracts,” and incorporated in all contracts prepared for projects that are designed or installed by NRCS. Exceptions may be granted by the State conservation engineer (SCE) if the type of work is outside the standard NRCS scope of expertise or due to other concerns. Specifications formats must remain consistent throughout a set of contract documents.
- B. Design drawings and specifications must reflect the level of complexity of the project. The responsible engineer or employee determines the adequacy of the drawings and specifications. Responsibility is determined in accordance with the level of engineering approval authority as defined in part 501 of this manual.
- C. Contracts for NRCS-funded projects designed by others and installed under non-Federal contracts may use specifications other than NRCS construction and material specifications. Sponsoring local organizations that either prepare their own designs or hire architect-engineer (A&E) firms for design are not required to use NRCS standard specifications but are encouraged to do so. Non-NRCS specifications must be compatible with all other provisions in the contract documents and must be equivalent to the NRCS standard specifications such that the completed project achieves similar standards of quality to NRCS construction efforts.
- D. Agreements with sponsoring local organizations and contracts with A&E firms for engineering design services must include preparation of construction and material specifications in the appropriate format (see section 542.01 A and C above).

542.2 Preparation of Standard Specifications

- A. Procedures for use of specifications for construction contracts are outlined in 210-NEH, Part 642, Chapter 1. National standard specifications for construction are located 210-NEH, Part 642, Chapter 2, and material specifications are in Chapter 3.
- B. The national standard specifications must be utilized verbatim, with two exceptions:

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- (1) Revisions allowed in paragraph D, below
- (2) Alternative methods that do not apply to the project may be deleted, as described in 210-NEH, Part 642, Chapter 1

C. National standard specifications are revised and issued through the Director, Conservation Engineering Division (CED), and become effective immediately upon posting on the eDirectives Web site.

D. The SCE may adapt the national construction and material specifications to better fit specific State needs.

- (1) The national specifications may be adapted if the amended specification is more stringent than the national specification.
- (2) If the SCE determines that a less-stringent specification is needed for certain practices within the State, then the amended specification and the circumstances for use must be approved by the Director, CED.

E. The SCE is responsible for the development of any new specifications at the State level. A new specification at the State level is issued as an interim specification with a maximum lifespan of 3 years following the issue date. At the end of an interim specification life, the SCE may allow the specification to expire or request action from the national construction engineer. There are two possible outcomes from requesting action:

- (1) If the specification has limited applicability (useful only in one or two States), the specification may be granted permanent status for the State submitting it. Maintenance of the specification will be the responsibility of the SCE.
- (2) If the specification is applicable to three or more States, the Director, CED, will evaluate it for inclusion as a national specification. The lifespan of the original interim specification may be extended until such time as the new national specification is released. State experience and recommendations must be provided if inclusion in the national specifications is requested.

F. Interim specifications may be written to address new technologies or materials. A variance must be requested from the Director, CED, prior to use in any contract documents. For each product or technology, include—

- (1) Technical data.
- (2) Benefits provided.
- (3) References where the product or technology has been used.
- (4) Independent laboratory test results, if applicable.
- (5) Draft specifications for the product or technology.

G. Variances may be approved on an evaluation basis. The manufacturer or supplier must be willing to be present during installation, as applicable, to ensure recommended procedures are followed. Do not use product or technology names in writing specifications.

542.3 Reference Specifications

A. Reference specifications are those specifications developed and issued by other agencies, associations, societies, or institutes, which are cited in 210-NEH, Parts 642, and Title 450, National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP).

B. The SCE must develop a system to maintain all current reference specifications cited in 210-NEH, Part 642, and 450-NHCP, as noted in section 542.20 of this manual, with the exception of American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standards (see section 542.03E below).

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C. Other NRCS engineering staff members designated by the SCE are to maintain or have direct access to copies of reference specifications as noted in section 542.20 of this manual.

D. Reference specifications that are outdated must be removed from the reference file at the time a revised or updated version is received.

E. ASTM standards cited in 210-NEH, Part 642, and 450-NHCP are made available to all NRCS and conservation district employees who are authorized to use an NRCS computer. The electronic standards are available through a portal (ASTM Portal) provided by ASTM International and accessed using an NRCS computer. ASTM standards downloaded from the ASTM Portal may not be transmitted electronically, in accordance with the NRCS agreement with ASTM International.

F. “As-built” documents and files must contain a list of all of the specific construction contract reference specifications used.