Controlling erosion on cropland has long been an Indiana conservation priority. However, agriculture is certainly not the only contributor to soil loss problems in the state. Erosion from land being converted to non-agricultural use has drawn increased public attention.

As Indiana grows, more and more land is taken for urban expansion. Residential and commercial construction has increased around a number of Indiana cities. With development comes the need for more roads, bridges, and schools. Unfortunately, soil and water conservation issues are often overlooked when construction takes place. Grading and other earth-disturbing activities leave the soil bare and vulnerable to erosion. Even if a site is "exposed" for only a short time, erosion rates can be very high—many times that occurring on cropland—unless proper measures are taken to stabilize the area.

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) by mandate of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is in the process of developing a general permit related to construction site activities. The purpose of the permit is to reduce pollutants, principally sediment as a result of soil erosion, in storm water discharge into waters of the state.

Erosion and sedimentation have economic as well as environmental costs—to everyone, not just the land user. Construction site erosion means loss of topsoil (making re-establishment of vegetation difficult), rilled and gullied slopes, washed out roads, and undercut pavements. Sediment resulting from soil erosion clogs storm sewers, culverts and drains, damages property, and reduces lake and reservoir capacity. In addition, sediment is the number one pollutant, by volume, in surface waters. Sediment can carry chemicals and nutrients that lower water quality, injure aquatic life, increase water treatment costs, and impair recreational use of Indiana's lakes and streams.
Many construction site erosion problems can be avoided or greatly reduced through proper land use and conservation. The key is to implement conservation practices before problems arise. Many of the principles used on agricultural land can be adapted to urban areas. Plans which consider existing topography, local soils, and minimum disturbance of natural vegetation will help reduce erosion hazards.

Areas which are disturbed should be adequately planned to reduce erosion and sedimentation. Erosion control can be achieved by exposing only small, workable areas of land for a short time and by the timely seeding of all un-vegetated areas.

The first step in preventing off-site sedimentation is to control erosion on the construction site. The second step is to trap sediment before it leaves the site. To trap sediment the runoff must be detained for a sufficient time to allow soil particles to settle out. There are several ways to achieve this goal. This could include vegetative filter strips, straw bale dams, silt fences, and sediment traps, either temporary or permanent.

Interest in protecting our soil resources continues to grow. The public is beginning to realize that soil erosion is an urban as well as agricultural problem. The economic and environmental damage associated with erosion and sedimentation costs everyone and should be a concern of the entire community.