

A Different Kind of **Invasive**

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Human and Environmental Threats from Coir Products

Coir is fiber that is obtained from the husk of a coconut. Coconuts do not naturally grow well in North America, thus, coir products are imported. Coir is commonly produced in South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Afghanistan and Iran. The majority of coir imports into the U.S. come from southern India and Sri Lanka.

Coir logs, also known as coconut logs, are tubular products that are filled with coir fibers (Figure 1). In the erosion control industry, a common application of coir logs is streambank stabilization. Streambank projects tend to be extremely environmentally sensitive sites that incorporate native vegetation as part of the long-term erosion control solution. With that being said, many erosion control professionals are puzzled why coir products that are imported from half-way

across the world are used on projects in North America.

Recently, a lakeshore project in picturesque northern Wisconsin had an alarming experience with coir logs. Several large purple spiders exited the coir log from India as it was placed into the stream. Mariquita Sheehan, Lake Conservation Specialist for Vilas County, states, “My concern is not so much invasive species – since it is unlikely that an equatorial species would survive our winters. But I am concerned that installers could potentially be bitten by non-native species that could cause some damage to their human victim – and local medical personnel would not be able to treat the bite properly.”

Many conservationists around North America are feverishly working to prevent the spread of invasive species. Why would we allow invasive species into our

environmentally friendly projects? What could happen to the ecosystem if these unknown exotic purple spiders or other invasive “hitchhikers” flourished here? These questions are unknown and better answered by eliminating the use of the products that contain the problem. Additionally, what would happen to the human victim if one of the large purple spiders bit them?

Medical professionals may or may not be able to treat the human victim properly because the culprit is unknown to North America. Are we willing to risk human health and the potential of introducing an exotic species for foreign products or is it time the erosion control industry diversifies into native alternatives?

Help protect our erosion control professionals and prevent the potential spread of invasive species by utilizing products from North America on your next project. If a foreign source of coir products is used, insure that the shipping container is fumigated and that the contents are certified as invasive-free.

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Figure 1. Coir logs are frequently used in shoreline and streambank stabilization.