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**Guidance on characterization of  
excavated soil and other materials  
intended for re-use**

*Lignes directrices sur la caractérisation de la terre excavée et d'autres  
matériaux du sol destinés à la réutilisation*



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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see [www.iso.org/directives](http://www.iso.org/directives)).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see [www.iso.org/patents](http://www.iso.org/patents)).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html).

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 190, *Soil quality*, Subcommittee SC 7, *Impact assessment*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 15176:2002), which has been technically revised. The main changes compared to the previous edition are as follows:

- introduction of references to the ISO 18400 series of standards;
- updated references to international standards.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at [www.iso.org/members.html](http://www.iso.org/members.html).

## Introduction

This document is one of a series providing guidance on the assessment of soils and soil materials in relation to certain functions and uses. It should be read in conjunction with other International Standards, some of which give more specific guidance in relation to some of the uses listed in the Scope or particular aspects of assessments. For example, ISO 15800<sup>1)</sup> gives guidance on assessments relating to human exposure to potentially harmful substances and ISO 15175 gives guidance on characterization of contaminated soil related to groundwater protection.

Soils are the dynamic product of chemical, physical and biological processes. They are the result of interactions between the inherent nature of the parent material, the prevailing environmental conditions and human activities. They are a valuable natural and finite resource which should be conserved wherever possible. When construction, mining or other activities require soils to be excavated and moved from their natural situation, they should as far as possible be re-used in a manner consistent with their natural properties and the intended use of the target location. Soils intended for re-use are usually required to have certain chemical, leaching, geotechnical, physical, biological and radiochemical attributes consistent with this future use. Particular attention should be paid in situations where there is reason to believe that the soil might be contaminated.

Soils that are to be excavated, stripped, or otherwise removed from their original location, should be investigated to determine how they can be re-used so as to minimize the quantities to be disposed of as waste and to determine environmental impacts that might arise during re-use. Treatment of soils and soil materials to remove or destroy contaminants or to reduce their availability to the environment can alter soil properties. These properties should therefore be determined before re-use. For manufactured soils, the characteristics of both the components and of the manufactured product might need to be determined.

The purpose of characterizing soil (or other media) as suggested in this document is usually to enable judgements to be made about its suitability for a defined use (e.g. arable farming, domestic gardens). These judgements can be made by reference to published international or national guidance that sets out physical, chemical or other generic criteria, or against criteria set on a site-specific basis. When substances are present that might be harmful to human health or the environment, the judgement can also be made on the basis of a site-specific qualitative, semi-quantitative or fully quantitative risk assessment. In many jurisdictions, formal guidance on such assessments has been published. In some cases this guidance fits within a legislative framework. Guidance has also been provided by professional organizations and some standardization bodies.

When deciding whether to re-use soil material, other possibly competing or overriding objectives such as protection of soil, nature, water and air; physical planning requirements and national legislative requirements should be considered.

Assessment of soil material for re-use could require the measurement of the chemical, physical, biological, geotechnical and radiochemical characteristics of soil material and of the source and target sites. The assessor should identify those parameters that are appropriate to the task in hand.

This document identifies the functions and properties of soil materials at the source (point of origin) and also the properties of the target (target) site which could be relevant to the potential uses listed in the Scope and indicates for which parameters or procedures there are International Standards available. Radiochemical and geotechnical aspects are not covered. For guidance on the geotechnical aspects of the use of soil materials as construction material, see also other relevant International Standards (e.g. those produced by ISO/TC 182, *Geotechnics in the field of civil engineering*) or national standards.

The way the soil is handled after excavation can affect soil properties. Some suggestions regarding good practice in soil handling and related practice and monitoring after placement are provided in [Annex B](#).

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1) Under preparation. Stage at the time of publication: ISO/FDIS 15800.



# Guidance on characterization of excavated soil and other materials intended for re-use

## 1 Scope

This document provides guidance on the range of tests that could be necessary to characterize soil and other soil materials intended to be re-used, with or without preliminary treatment (e.g. screening to remove over large material). It is intended to be of use in determining the suitability of soil materials for re-use (see 3.4.1), and the assessment of the environmental impacts that might arise from re-use. It takes into account the different requirements of topsoil, sub-soil and other soil materials such as sediments or treated soils. International Standard methods are listed that might be of use for characterization.

Soil materials include natural soils and other materials (e.g. fill, made ground) excavated, stripped, or otherwise removed from their original in-ground or above-ground location (e.g. stockpile), dredged materials, manufactured soils, and soil treated to remove or destroy contaminants. For manufactured soils, which are often made using excavated materials together with other materials such as “green waste”, the characteristics of the components and of the manufactured product might need to be determined.

NOTE The terms “excavated soil” and “excavated soil materials” are used for brevity throughout the document to embrace the range of materials covered.

An overriding principle governing the guidance provided in this document is that when there is to be no change in intended land use at the target site, imported soil materials cannot lead to a permanent reduction in performance of relevant soil functions.

The guidance provided is intended to cover a range of possible end uses, including:

- play areas for small children, including nursery schools, kindergartens, etc.;
- schools;
- gardens and other residential areas;
- allotments;
- horticulture;
- agriculture;
- forestry;
- recreational areas, e.g. parks, sport fields;
- restoration of damaged ecosystems;
- mining and industrial sites;
- construction sites;
- road and rail constructions.

It is not applicable to the placement of soil materials in an aqueous environment or to restore underground workings. It does not address geotechnical requirements when soil materials are to be used as construction material.

NOTE The sensitive end uses listed above such as play areas for small children, schools, gardens, agriculture and recreational areas require particular care, particularly when excavated soils are derived from contaminated sites.

## 2 Normative reference

There are no normative references in this document.

## 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

### 3.1 Types of soil and other soil materials

#### 3.1.1

##### **soil**

upper layer of the Earth's crust transformed by weathering and physical/chemical and biological processes composed of mineral particles, organic matter, water, gases and living organisms organized in generic soil horizons

Note 1 to entry: In a broader civil engineering sense, soil includes topsoil and sub-soil; deposits such as clays, silts, sands, gravels, cobbles, boulders and organic matter and deposits such as peat; materials of human origin such as wastes; ground gas and moisture; and living organisms.

[SOURCE: ISO 11074:2015, 2.1.11, modified — "gases" replaces "air".]

#### 3.1.2

##### **topsoil**

upper part of a natural soil that is generally dark coloured and has a higher content of organic matter and nutrients when compared to the (mineral) horizons below, excluding the humus layer

Note 1 to entry: For arable land, topsoil refers to the ploughed soil depth, while for grassland; it is the soil layer with high root content.

[SOURCE: ISO 11074:2015, 2.1.21]

#### 3.1.3

##### **subsoil**

natural soil material below the topsoil and overlying the parent material parent rock beneath

Note 1 to entry: All or much of the original rock structure has usually been obliterated by pedogenic processes.

[SOURCE: ISO 11074:2015, 2.1.20, modified — "parent rock beneath" added.]

#### 3.1.4

##### **soil material**

material composed of excavated soil, dredged materials, manufactured soils, treated soils and fill materials

[SOURCE: ISO 11074:2015, 7.4.16]