Alternative Sandbags

Traditional sandbags: the drawbacks

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Traditional sandbags have been a popular option as when used correctly, they can prevent floodwater from entering properties or areas for short periods of time. However, they also come with some drawbacks:

- Although they are cheap and easy to obtain, supply may be limited during a flood event
- Once wet, hessian sacks will break and rot if they are left for long periods of time, often spilling sand which can silt up drainage channels.
- Due to their weight (~13kg), wet or dry, they can be heavy and difficult to handle.
- They must be disposed of correctly. Sand is classed as building waste and should not be put in household waste bins.

What are alternative sandbags?

Alternative 'sandless' sandbags have been developed as a more practical and environmentally friendly option which have many advantages over traditional sandbags.

Alternative sandbags are filled with a pulp and polymer which absorbs water causing the bag to swell. The inner gel-like substance allows the bag to easily mould into corners and help create a seal with surfaces.

When dry, alternative sandbags weigh a fraction of the weight of traditional sandbags (less than 10% in some cases), making them easy to ship, transport, or store until required.

They must be activated before use by soaking them with water for 2-3 minutes until they have absorbed water to their full size. Once activated, they can then be used to protect water entry points or laid out as barriers to divert surface water during a flood.

After the flood event, certain products can be disposed of by cutting the outer fabric and emptying the biodegradable contents into the earth or soil. The outer fabric can then be disposed of in the household waste bin.

Some alternative sandbag products can be reused multiple times, however once any sandbag is contaminated with foul or sewage water, it is recommended that they are disposed of appropriately.

Images: The Flood Hub

Sandbags are not suitable for all circumstances or events and cannot be guaranteed to prevent your home from flooding. They must be used correctly to have the best chance of success. It is important to consider all water entry points to your home and the full range of options that are available to make your home or business more flood resilient so it can recover from the effects of flooding more efficiently. You can find more information at: https://thefloodhub.co.uk/pfr/