PEAK VS RESIDUAL SHEAR STRENGTH FOR LANDFILL BOTTOM LINER STABILITY ANALYSES

Richard Thiel
Thiel Engineering, Oregon House, CA, USA

ABSTRACT

The decision whether to use peak or residual shear strengths for a stability analysis must be made in the context of a specific design situation. Yet even when the specific situation is defined, the decision of whether to use peak or residual shear strength is often unclear. In general, if there are potential construction, operation, or design conditions that might cause relative displacement between layers, then a post-peak or residual shear strength for the layer having the lowest peak strength is appropriate. If seismic analyses predict deformation on a given interface, then the design should use the post-peak or residual shear strength for that interface. For bottom liner systems, where stress distribution along the liner system is very complex, it is advisable to verify that the slope stability has a factor of safety greater than unity for residual shear strength conditions along the critical interface.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the forces that support a landfill on its liner system, and the shear strength of geosynthetic interfaces that keep the mass from sliding. Figure 1 schematically portrays the shear forces that work to keep the waste mass from sliding. If sliding occurs, the surface along which sliding would occur is called the critical surface, or potential slip plane. Bottom liner systems that use geosynthetics often have their critical surface along one of the geosynthetic interfaces. The shear strength of these interfaces can usually be measured by means of laboratory testing. These interfaces often realize their peak shear strength within a small amount of relative displacement (on the order of 25 mm), after which their shear strength decreases. Typically, after 50 to 300 mm of relative displacement, the shear strength is reduced to a steady minimum value, which is called the residual shear strength of that interface. Figure 2 shows a typical shear stress-displacement curve for a geosynthetic interface.

Over the life of a landfill the following activities occur: the liner system is built; waste is placed; settlement occurs; a final cover system is installed; and settlement and degradation of the waste continues. Each of these phases of the landfill's life produces different combinations of normal and shear stresses on the liner system. Landfill leachate and gas, which can create destabilizing pore pressures, are by-products of the landfill, and are removed with varying degrees of efficiency. The primary questions addressed in this paper are:

- Should a designer use peak or residual shear strengths, something in between, or a combination of peak and residual strengths, when evaluating a landfill design?
- What does the profession really know about the mobilized shear stresses? (This paper will focus on bottom liner systems.)
- Should the same choice whether to use peak or residual shear strengths be applied along the entire lining system, or should slopes and base liners be treated differently?
- Is there a preferred design approach?
- What factors of safety are appropriate for design?

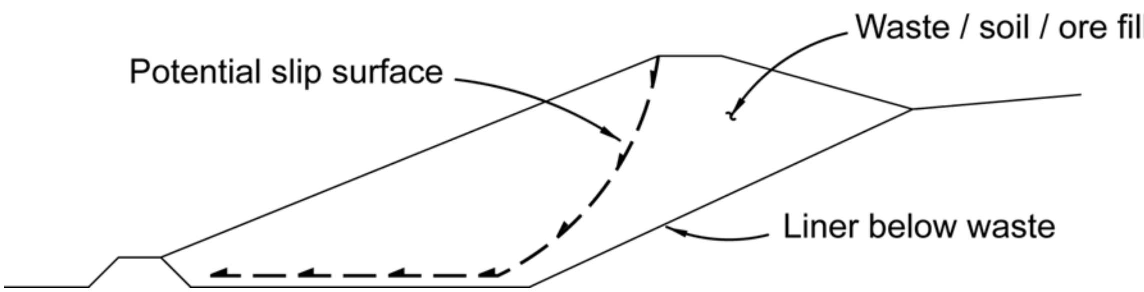

Figure 1 – Schematic of Shear Forces Along Critical Slip Plane

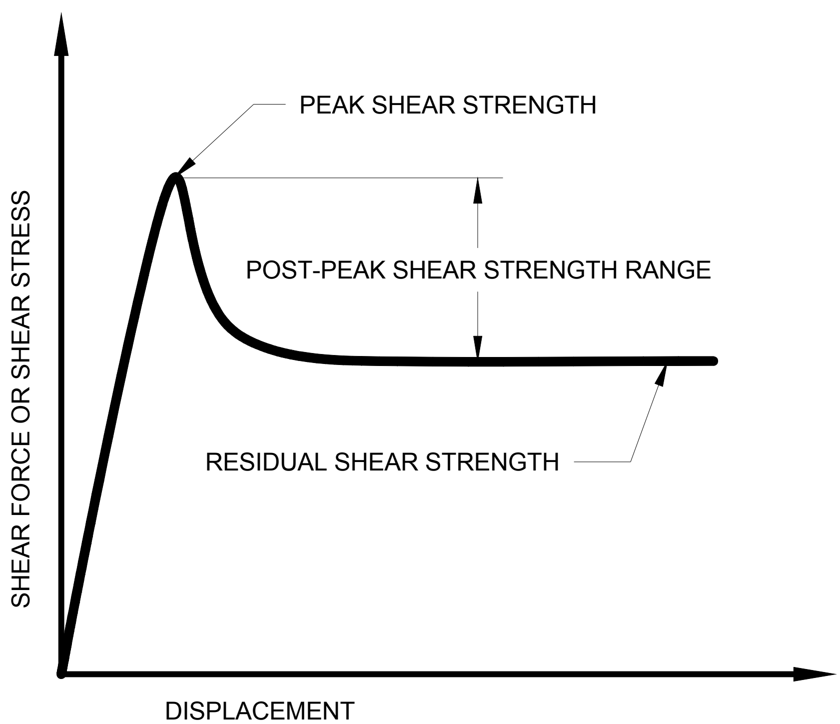

Figure 2 – Example Graph of Shear Force vs. Deformation for Geosynthetic Interface

ORGANIZATION OF THIS PAPER

Part 1 of the paper describes general considerations in performing slope stability analyses. It begins with a discussion of different types of slope stability analyses, including limit equilibrium, finite element, and 2-dimensional (2-D) vs. 3-dimensional (3-D) analyses. Understanding how the state-of-the-practice has developed, and the limitations of the analytical approach, both contribute strongly to making the right selection of appropriate shear strengths and factors of safety.

2-D limit-equilibrium analyses are by far the most common approach for evaluating slope stability. Part 1 discusses practical guidelines and common pitfalls that affect the results of these analyses, especially the selection of the critical shear plane on which the peak or residual shear strength will be modeled. Part 1 also discusses how pore pressures might cause a surface to exceed its peak shear strength and induce progressive failure. Selecting the appropriate shear strength requires an understanding of the effective normal stress range. Also, commissioning direct shear testing from a laboratory requires that one understand the proper testing parameters needed to obtain appropriate peak and/or residual shear strength values.

Part 2 of the paper directly addresses the question of peak vs. residual shear strength, and begins by discussing ductile vs. brittle behavior. Progressive failure, which occurs with brittle materials, then emerges as the chief concern of this paper. The discussion that follows considers conditions that could cause a brittle material to exceed its peak strength in the context of a landfill bottom liner, followed by a brief summary of field observations in this regard.

Part 3 discusses possible design approaches in terms of the selection of peak strength, residual strength, and hybrid approaches, and then considers the appropriate factors of safety for these different approaches.

Part 4 then presents conclusions reached from the preceding discussions. It also provides recommendations for practical design approaches based on the author's experience, as well as recommendations for further research.

This paper surveys the key considerations one employs when deciding whether to use peak or residual shear strength for bottom liner systems in landfills. It does not presume to make that decision, but rather seeks to outline and discuss all considerations that are necessary and pertinent to that process. Although many of the considerations this paper presents may be general enough to apply to cover (veneer) systems, it has been written solely with bottom liner systems in mind, and does not consider the long-term issues related to cover systems.

PART 1 – GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

LIMIT-EQUILIBRIUM VS FINITE-ELEMENT ANALYSES

Limit-equilibrium analyses, whether 2-D or 3-D, are the most common methods of assessing slope stability. These methods can be performed by hand or, more commonly, by using a computer program. Such analyses evaluate the force and moment equilibrium of a slope on an assumed slip plane given assumed shear strength, unit weight, and pore pressure parameters. The result of these analyses is then presented as a factor of safety (*FS*) defined as:

$$FS = \frac{\text{Shear strength along the slip surface}}{\text{Shear stress along the slip surface}}$$

One defining characteristic of the limit-equilibrium approach is that it presumes that the factor of safety is the same everywhere along the slip plane. Therefore, the mobilized shear stress distribution along the slip plane is simplistically assumed to be a constant ratio of the shear strength along that plane. Such analyses also do not take into account elastic or plastic deformation. These are both significant considerations when deciding whether to use peak or residual shear strength.

Finite-element analyses attempt to calculate the stress distribution and deformations in a soil mass. In addition to considering force and moment equilibrium, these analyses also typically consider the materials' elastic modulus and Poisson's ratio, and some models can also calculate the change in shear strength with displacement for various materials. The result of these analyses is usually presented as a distribution of mobilized shear stress and displacements.

At first glance it would seem that finite-element analyses offer more of what we wish from a slope stability analysis as opposed to limit-equilibrium analyses. So much so, that we might even ask ourselves why we continue to bother with limit-equilibrium analyses. The fact remains, however, that the limit-equilibrium approach has been and will continue to be the basis of standard practice in the industry. The reasons for this, some of which also appear in the next section that considers 2-D vs. 3-D, are:

- Limit-equilibrium approaches have been performed and "calibrated" through industry experience for the past 80 years. Properly performed limit-equilibrium analyses have been proven to be adequate.
- Finite-element analyses are sophisticated and complicated to perform. The average design practitioner often is not adequately trained to perform such analyses, and the low frequency of projects that require their use do not justify the

resources needed to keep an engineer qualified to perform them on every landfill-design firm's staff.

- In the past few years the author has peer-reviewed a number of slope stability analyses. On four major landfill projects for which calculations had been prepared by separate reputable nationwide and local design firms, the author found fundamental errors in 2-D limit-equilibrium analyses. Some of these projects had already been built and were, in the author's opinion, at serious risk of large-scale failure. If such fundamental errors continue to be made with analyses as simple as 2-D limit-equilibrium, the prospects of universalizing a finite-element approach for the solid waste industry is not very promising. Finite-element analyses epitomize the expression "garbage-in garbage-out", so strict quality control and quality assurance is in order whenever they are employed.

2-D vs. 3-D ANALSYES

One issue that is periodically debated in the literature and at professional gatherings is the use of 2-D as opposed to 3-D analyses. Soong et al. (1998) question whether 2-D analyses are appropriate for landfills, and suggest it would be more appropriate to use 3-D analyses with residual strengths. From a pragmatic point of view, the everyday stability analysis has been, and will continue to be, 2-D in actual practice. There are three main reasons for this, clearly laid out by Duncan (1996):

- Inherent Conservatism. Properly performed 2-D analyses always give a factor of safety that is equal to or less than those given by 3-D analyses. 2-D analyses, therefore, are more conservative.

- Ease of Application. The average professional consulting engineer is interested in the amount of time it will take to arrive at an answer, the frequency of projects that will require special attention, and the effort it will take to organize the results in a final report. 3-D applications are simply not as easy to use as 2-D.

- Avoidance of Errors. As illustrated above, analyses are prone to errors, and 3-D analyses are more complicated than 2-D analyses. The author believes that the emphasis in the profession needs to be on performing solid, fundamental engineering, rather than on increased sophistication that invites more errors.

3-D analyses have mostly been used for forensic studies, and for those few complex situations that involve a very unusual geometry and/or distribution of shear strengths in the potential sliding mass. Examples of these can be found in Stark and Eid (1998). In the author's 16 years of experience performing stability analyses on dams, embankments, cut slopes, and landfills, there were only three situations where a 3-D analysis was warranted during design, and all three were satisfactorily accomplished using multiple 2-D sections. One of these projects was given as an example in the Stark and Eid (1998) paper. In that case Stark and Eid (1998) felt that a 2-D slope stability analysis could not anticipate the combined effects of the project's complicated geometry and shear strength zones. After discussion of the project's complexity, they reported a minimum 3-D factor of safety of 1.65 using a 3-D analysis program. In fact, the original design team, of which the author was a part, had two years earlier calculated a factor of safety of 1.60 using weighted averages of several 2-D cross-sections. Thus, even in this circumstance that had unusually complicated geometry and shear strength conditions, a modified-2-D approach gave results one would expect relative to the 3-D analysis results.

Notwithstanding the reservations given above, 3-D analyses will well serve those who have the time and budget to perform them.

To summarize, the refinements in accuracy offered by 3-D analyses are rarely matched by the average practitioner's understanding of basic slope stability mechanics, much less the level of confidence ordinarily offered by assumed shear-strength and pore-pressure parameters. Most often, the differences in shear strength and pore-pressure assumptions made by different engineers will substantially outweigh the refinements obtained by favoring 3-D over 2-D analyses. Compare, for example, the different conclusions reached by Schmucker and Hendron (1998) versus Stark et al. (2000) regarding the cause of a major landfill failure; or the difference in 2-D vs. 3-D comparisons for a landfill failure described by Soong et al. (1998), from those made by Stark et al. (1998). These case histories, recently published by experienced professionals, do not provide a compelling argument that 3-D analyses should be preferred. They do, however, reinforce the notion that the major factors contributing to uncertainty in a slope's performance are shear strengths and fluid pressures, and that this is where our attention should be focused. The purpose of this paper is to focus specifically on one of these issues, namely, when it is appropriate to use residual vs. peak shear strength for geosynthetic interfaces at the base of a waste containment facility.

GENERAL DISCUSSION OF 2-D ANALYSIS APPROACH

<u>Method of Analysis</u>

Slope stability analyses are most commonly assessed using computer programs that evaluate the limit equilibrium of a 2-D cross-section. Less sophisticated limit equilibrium analyses can be performed using hand-calculation methods or charts. Hand calculations are an effective analysis tool because they often provide a clearer understanding of the critical aspects of the problem, and mistakes in geometry and assumed failure planes are less likely. A common approach is to perform a hand check on the most critical surface that has been analyzed by a computer program. A good summary of slope stability approaches using hand calculations is provided by Abramson et al. (1996).

Limit-equilibrium analyses of varying complexity that have been developed are available to design practitioners. One of the first approaches was the Ordinary Method of Slices developed by Fellenius. Later refinements were presented by Bishop, Janbu, Morgenstern and Price, Spencer, and others. A review of these methods is beyond the scope of this paper, and the reader is referred to Abramson et al. (1996) and Duncan (1996) as a starting place for a comparison of the various limit-equilibrium methods. The author would, however, offer three points from his own practice as to which method to use for performing stability analyses of bottom liner systems:

- The Bishop method is generally not applicable when analyzing bottom liner system geometries because it was developed for circular failure surfaces. The critical slip plane for liner systems is often a translational block that is non-circular.
- Spencer's method, which is now commonly available in computer codes, is considered more rigorous and complete in its analysis than the simplified Janbu method, which is commonly used for block analyses. Spencer's method is computationally more intensive, however, and may be difficult to use for random searches for a critical failure surface, even with modern computers. It is also less stable and can yield incorrect results unless the line of thrust results are checked by the user. Therefore, a good practice is to search for the critical surface using Janbu's simplified approach, and then perform a final check on the stability using Spencer's method. Usually, but not always, Janbu's method will result in a slightly higher factor of safety.
- The approach developed by NAVFAC (1982) for translational block analyses is often a good and appropriate method for performing a hand-check on the computer results for a 2-D translational block failure along a bottom liner system.

Identification of Critical Slip Plane

The most typical requirement for static stability is to meet a specified factor of safety. Just what constitutes an appropriate factor of safety will be discussed later in this paper. The idea is that if the stability analysis is performed correctly with the proper input variables, the factor of safety should provide a level of confidence that the slope will in fact be stable.

The essential operative words in the above paragraph relating to stability analyses is that they are "*performed correctly*". The safety margin in a factor of safety exists to account for unknown or unpredicted deviations from the original design assumptions. It is not, however, supposed to account for errors in the analysis, or incorrect geometric and material property assumptions.

When performing a correct analysis the critical slip plane for analysis must be identified correctly. An experienced geotechnical engineer is usually required in order to select the critical cross-sections for analysis of a slope. Even for experienced practitioners, though, it is not always obvious which section is the most critical, and several trials generally need to be performed. For very complicated geometries, as described in the previous section, multiple 2-D sections may need to be weighted in order to simulate a 3-D analysis, or the more complex 3-D analysis can actually be performed.

In addition to selecting the proper cross-section, it is also important to search for and select the correct critical slip plane within that cross-section. In peer-reviewing slope stability analyses performed by others, the author has found errors in which the designer had correctly identified the critical cross-section, but incorrectly identified the critical slip plane within that cross-section. He found others, too, in which the designer had conceptually identified the correct slip plane, but failed to code the computer program to correctly place the slip plane at the correct interface within the liner system. The effects of such errors was to drop from an ignorantly-blissful factor of safety of 2 to 3, to an uncomfortable factor of safety of less than 1.1.

When the critical slip plane is along the liner system, the critical surface is always the one that has the lowest peak strength. If residual strengths are used in the analysis, they should reflect the surface that has the lowest peak shear strength, because that is the one that will govern deformations.

Pore Pressures

Next to gravity, pore pressures (most pervasively those caused by liquid as opposed to gas) are the single most prevalent factor contributing to slope stability failures. They are also among the most overlooked elements in slope stability analyses. Schmucker and Hendron (1998) illuminate this problem when they state that "Very little is known at this time regarding the generation and distribution of pore pressures in MSW landfills."

The one area where evaluating the influence of pore pressures on slope stability has been well focused has been in the design of dams. For this reason there have been few dam failures due to the neglect of pore pressures, with dam failures in the past century generally being caused by other factors (e.g. liquifaction or piping). Pore pressures are not commonly included in landfill analyses. Yet most (or at least many) of the dramatic landfill failures reported in the industry can be attributed to pore pressures that built up either in the foundation, due to waste loading, or in the waste itself, due to leachate buildup or leachate injection. Examples are the Rumpke landfill failure (see Schmucker and Hendron, 1998, who attributed the failure in part to leachate buildup caused by an ice dam at the toe), and the Dona Juana landfill failure (see Hendron et al., 1999, who attributed the failure to high-pressure leachate injection).

When performing slope stability analyses, designers should consider the potential for unanticipated pore pressures. Unanticipated conditions may occur in landfills due to clogging of the leachate collection systems, or aggressive leachate recirculation in the waste mass. Additional discussion of this issue is provided by Koerner and Soong (2000). Further discussion later in this paper describes how pore pressures could lead to a localized exceedence of peak strength, leading ultimately to a progressive failure.

Selecting and Measuring Material Shear Strengths

Shear Strength Definition. Figure 3 illustrates a non-linear shear strength envelope, which is typical for many soil and geosynthetic interfaces. Sometimes the non-linearity is slight, and a straight-line approximation over the entire load range under consideration can be valid. This is often true for very narrow load ranges such as those considered for cover veneer systems. At other times this non-linearity is quite significant, especially when shear strength characteristics are evaluated over the broad range of normal loads indicative of bottom lining systems.

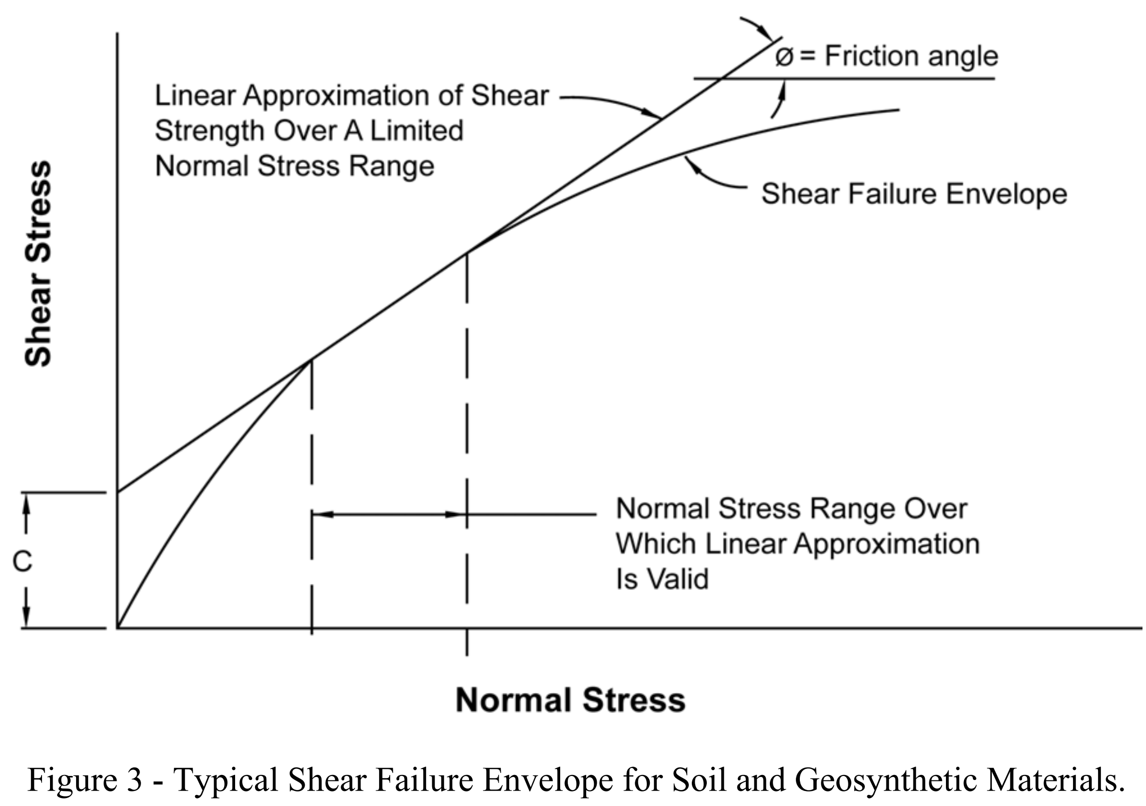

Figure 3 - Typical Shear Failure Envelope for Soil and Geosynthetic Materials.

If the shear strength curve of the evaluated materials is non-linear with respect to normal load, then special consideration should be given to defining the shear strength parameters within a specific normal load range. Many computer programs only allow the input of linear shear strength parameters. These parameters are normally identified as a friction parameter *(ϕ)* and a cohesion (or adhesion) parameter (*c*). It is useful to recognize that these are often only mathematical parameters that describe the shear strength of a material or interface over a specific normal load range. The shear strength parameters are demonstrated in Figure 3.

Draft European Standards, and other publications (e.g. Koerner and Daniel, 1997) suggest that the apparent cohesion of a shear strength envelope can be ignored. As stated by Jones and Dixon (1998): "This assumption can have a significant effect in that the shear strength for any particular normal stress will be quoted as being lower than measured… It is possible that the failure envelope may curve to the origin at very low normal stresses, in which case ignoring the apparent cohesion will result in over conservative results." If we recognize that the values of the parameters ϕ and c are only mathematical tools used to describe the measured or estimated shear strength over a given normal load range, we can discount statements that advocate that cohesion can be ignored.

The friction parameter (ϕ) is related to the slope of the line (slope = $\tan\phi$), the cohesion parameter (c) is the y-intercept, and the normal load range is the abscissa range over which the straight-line approximation of the shear strength envelope is valid. Use of the shear strength parameters outside of the normal load range for which they were defined is generally non-conservative, as illustrated in Figure 3.

If the computer program only allows the consideration of linear shear strength envelopes, the shear strength envelope for non-linear materials should be discretized into a series of straight-line approximations for different normal load ranges. Furthermore, where the critical slip surface runs through a material or interface that exhibits a non-linear strength envelope, the designer should either use a computer code that allows input of a non-linear shear strength envelope, or assign different strength parameters to different zones of the material or interface according to the normal loading it theoretically experiences. For computer codes that do not allow non-linear shear strength envelopes, the delineation of different normal-load zones for non-linear materials is usually calculated by hand. This procedure is outlined in detail by Thiel et al. (2001).

Shear Strength Measurement. For geosynthetic lining systems, the internal and interface shear strength is normally determined by using the direct shear test in accordance with ASTM D 5321. For GCL internal and interface shear strength evaluation, direct shear testing is conducted in accordance with ASTM D 6243. In these direct shear tests, the geosynthetic material and one or more contact surfaces, such as soil or other geosynthetics, are placed within a direct shear box. The specimens are hydrated, consolidated, and placed under a constant normal load in accordance with the ASTM procedures, along with any project-specific testing clarifications/instructions from the design engineer. A tangential (shear) force is applied to the materials, causing one section of the box to move in relation to the other section. The shear force needed to cause movement is recorded as a function of horizontal displacement.

The test is normally performed for several different normal loads. Typically a series of at least three individual tests are performed at specified normal load conditions. The normal load and shear forces are converted to stresses by the given area over which shear occurred, typically a 12 in x 12 in (300 mm x 300 mm) sample. The peak and post-peak (or residual, if deformation is taken far enough) shear strengths are plotted on a graph, and a best-fit straight line or curve is fit through the data to represent the shear strength envelope. Several factors can influence the interface shear strength of geosynthetics. The most important of these are discussed below.

Valid Testing Technique. While not offering any endorsements, the author can state that he trusts very few laboratories in the nation to provide high quality direct shear test data. Initial ASTM round-robin testing of even the most simple interface (nonwoven geotextile against a smooth HDPE geomembrane) produced a shot-gun scatter of results with very poor correlation. Unless the initial test data has integrity, most of the further considerations offered in this paper become meaningless. It is imperative that the designer screen the testing laboratory in order to obtain test data of assured accuracy.

Rate of Shear Displacement. The typical default shear rate for direct shear testing with geosynthetics as presented in ASTM D 5321 is 0.04 in/min (1.0 mm/min). For testing hydrated GCLs, ASTM D 6243 provides guidance on attaining consolidated drained conditions that should preclude the build-up of excess pore pressures.

In general the rate of shear displacement affects peak strength more than residual strength. Depending on the interface being tested, the strain rate of the test should be slow enough to give results representative of long-term (slow) shear conditions.

Hydration. The moisture content, degree of saturation, and degree of consolidation of adjacent soils and geosynthetics can all exert an influence on the shear strength results. It is important to direct the testing laboratory as to the sequence of hydration and consolidation. With clay soils adjacent to geosynthetics, it is generally more conservative to hydrate under low normal loads before consolidating. Thus far, the type of hydrating fluid has not been reported in the literature as affecting shear strength results, especially in regard to typical landfill leachates.

Normal Stress. The most common strength-related errors in computer slope stability analyses stem from using strength parameters that do not correspond to the normal load conditions at the surface being analyzed (Lambe et al., 1989). It is generally unconservative to extrapolate linear strength envelopes beyond the limits for which they were defined. It is, therefore, important that shear test data be acquired under normal loading conditions that are representative of the conditions being analyzed. For base liners this is zero to full height of the waste mass.

Utilization of Representative Materials. Designers often tend to use either published literature values or previously obtained test results for shear strengths. In such cases, their experience and judgment may assist them in selecting shear strength parameters for the purposes of preliminary design. It is highly recommended, however, that material-specific testing be performed to assist in preparing the final construction specifications, and/or to verify the actual materials delivered as part of a CQA program. The reason for this is that the variation in geosynthetic manufacturing parameters from job to job can have a significant effect on shear strength. The most significant of these is the degree of texturing on coextruded geomembranes. Figure 4 presents a graph showing the difference in peak and post-peak shear strengths obtained with two different degrees of texturing. Designers can use this concept to their advantage, as will be discussed later. Designers unaware of this issue may test a manufacturer's sample and obtain passing results, and then use GRI-GM 13 as a texturing specification. This would provide an extremely low-level requirement for texturing that may not achieve the same interface shear strength as the nice sample provided for initial testing by the manufacturer. The same principle may hold for geotextile-based products, whose fiber denier size, fiber type, degree of needling, etc. can influence its interface shear strength properties. The only way to be sure is to test the actual materials provided for construction.

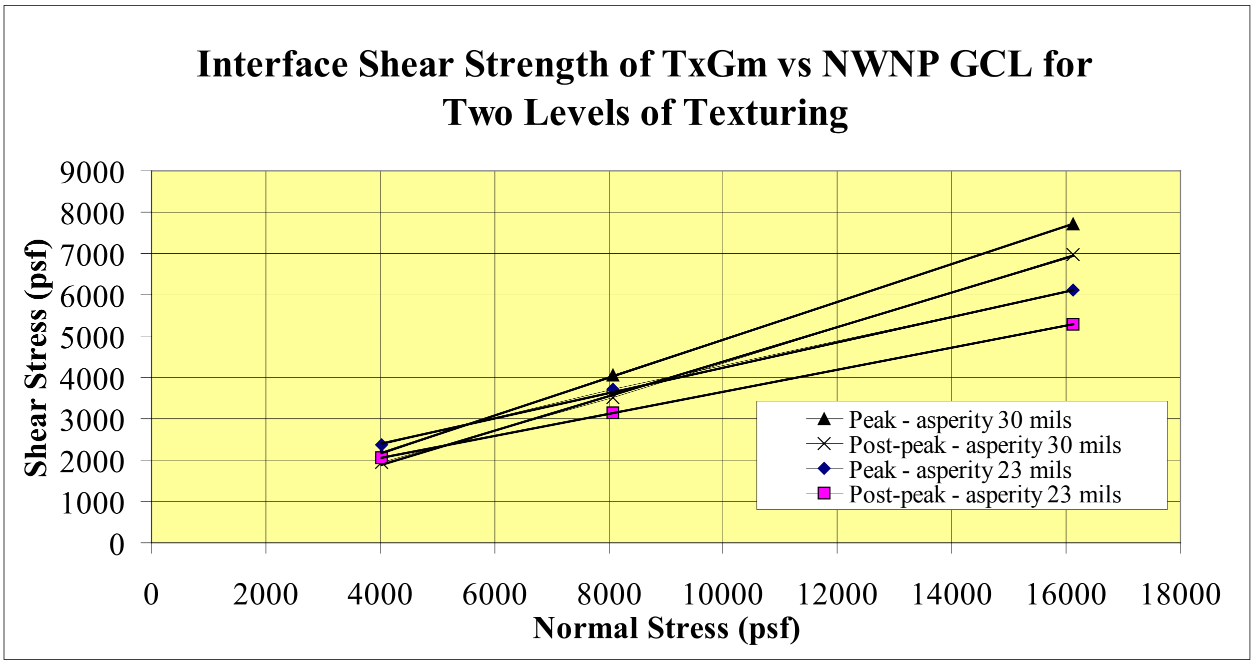

Figure 4 – Variation of Interface Shear Strength with Different Degrees of Geomembrane Texturing

Adjacent Materials and Consolidation Time. Using representative materials for direct shear testing refers not just to the materials for the interface being tested, but also to the adjacent materials. The use of realistic adjacent soil materials will typically provide slightly higher interface shear strengths than will, for example, the use of steel plates. In the same vein, Breitenbach and Swan (1999) show that longer load consolidation times result in a significant increase in interface shear strengths, apparently due to micro-scale load-induced deformation of the interface materials. Jones and Dixon (1998) question the used of the ring-shear apparatus for testing, because the narrow specimen of limited surface area on hard, smooth boundaries may not be representative of field conditions. These factors can affect both the peak and post-peak shear strength results.

Peak vs. Post-Peak vs. Residual Shear Strength. The highest level of shear strength measured in a direct shear test under a given normal load is defined as the peak strength. With continued shear displacement there is typically a loss of strength. The shear strength at any given displacement past the point of peak strength is referred to as "post-peak strength". The strength at which there is no further strength loss with continued displacement is called the "residual strength". Many of the most common direct shear devices do not allow enough displacement to occur that would enable true residual strength to be measured (e.g., see Stark et al., 1996). Therefore, in some cases it is not technically correct to refer to end-of-test conditions as representing the "residual" strength, but rather, to refer to "post-peak" strength while also specifying the amount of displacement. For the purposes of this paper, the lowest expected shear strength after significant deformation (typically more than 3-6 inches [70-150 mm]) is described as the residual shear strength. Shear strengths between the peak and residual shear strength are referred to as post-peak. This brings us then, to the main focus of this paper, which is whether it is appropriate to use peak or residual shear strengths (or something in between).

PART 2 – PEAK vs. RESIDUAL: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION ON BRITTLE MATERIALS AND PROGRESSIVE FAILURE

Many, but not all, geosynthetic interfaces are strain softening. This highlights the essence of the peak vs. residual question. With a relatively short amount of deformation (typically less than 25 mm), the materials pass beyond peak strength into a lower post-peak shear strength, ultimately becoming what we call residual. In geotechnical engineering these shear strength characteristics are also sometimes called 'brittle' – brittle meaning that the material substantially decreases in strength after it is "broken", that is, has gone past peak strength. (Note that this has nothing to do with the tensile behavior of the material.) This behavior is in contrast to a ductile shear interface, which continues to deform after reaching its peak strength, but retains its strength close to the peak. An example of a brittle geosynthetic interface is an HDPE textured geomembrane against a geotextile, which produces a dramatic drop in strength after the peak strength is exceeded. An example of a ductile geosynthetic interface is a smooth PVC geomembrane against a geotextile (see data published by Hillman and Stark, 2001). Also, MSW waste is generally considered a ductile material in terms of shear strength (Kavazanjian, 2001).

As a progressive failure develops, the shear stresses are redistributed within the slope. This often involves the slow deformation of the failing mass over time, followed by an abrupt slide. If the critical plane supporting a slope is brittle, and for some reason part of it is stressed past its peak strength, then that part quickly becomes significantly weaker, which means it can carry less of the load. That in turn puts more of the load on other parts of the critical plane, which may in turn cause another part of that plane to become overstressed and exceed its peak strength. The continuation of this process is called progressive failure. At some point the entire system becomes overstressed and an abrupt failure occurs. This is the concern when there is a brittle interface.

Progressive failures have been characteristically noted for stiff clays, as described by LaRochelle (1989): "We have come to realize that we cannot count on the peak strength in this strain-softening material either for short- or long-term stability." Past landfill failures have been attributed to this same phenomenon (Schmucker and Hendron, 1998; Mazzucato et al., 1999; Stark et al., 2000), which holds significant potential for future failures (Gilbert and Byrne, 1996).

POTENTIAL CONDITIONS THAT MAY LEAD TO PROGRESSIVE FAILURE

Several reasons are provided below which explain why the peak strength of a bottom liner interface might unexpectedly be exceeded.

Non-Uniform Stress Distribution and Strain Incompatibility

Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons to be concerned about progressive failure in liner systems is that the stress distribution along the liner interface is not known. "It is impossible to obtain all of the necessary information in most cases" to perform a rigorous analysis of a progressive failure process (Tiande et al. 1999). "It is difficult to determine the available shear resistance along an interface exhibiting strain-softening behavior. It may be unsafe to assume that peak strength is available, while it may be excessively conservative and costly to assume that only the residual strength is available" (Gilbert and Byrne, 1996).

The complexities of stress distribution are affected by the type of loading and by pore pressures. According to Li and Lam (2001) ".. the development of progressive failure will also be different depending on whether failure is triggered by a rise in water table *[insert by author: namely, leachate]* or an increase in external loading *[insert by author: namely, continued waste stacking]*".

Reddy et al. (1996) present a most interesting finite-element modeling study that evaluates the stress distribution and deformations along a landfill liner system for an assumed landfill geometry. Their study compares smooth and textured interfaces for different stiffnesses of waste. Although their analysis did not model strain-softening behavior of the interfaces, the results provide valuable insight into stress and strain distribution. Some of the conclusions from their study are:

- The stiffness of the waste influences the distribution of interface stress and shear displacements. Stiffer waste puts more stress and strain on side slopes (especially the lower part of the slope). Softer (more compressible) waste puts more stress on the base liner below the highest part of the waste, and more strain accumulation towards the toe. The overall factor of safety, however, is not affected by the waste stiffness, assuming that no strain-softening of the interface shear strength occurs.

- The smooth interface with 11° friction reached its peak strength in a number of places along the interface in their example, even though the global factor of safety was 1.5. The textured interface did not approach its peak strength anywhere along the interface in their example, but had a factor of safety of over 4. This means that a typical stability evaluation that results in a factor of safety of 1.5 may actually result in areas of the critical interface achieving their peak strength and possibly going into a reduced post-peak strength.

A finite element study was performed by Filz et al. (2001) who reached conclusions similar to those obtained by Reddy et al. (1996). Filz et al. (2001) provided a compelling demonstration that a smooth clay-geomembrane interface exhibiting strain-softening characteristics might be inappropriate to analyze based on peak shear strengths. They showed that the distribution of mobilized shear stresses was not uniform along the base and side slope, and would result in progressive exceedence of peak strength. Their comparative analyses demonstrated that whereas a limit-equilibrium analysis based on peak strengths might result in FS = 1.6, the finite-element analysis would suggest impending failure (i.e. FS = 1.0). The same problems analyzed using residual shear strengths in limit-equilibrium analyses resulted in an average FS = 0.94. Furthermore, for a finite-element analysis to show FS = 1.5, the limit-equilibrium analysis based on peak strengths needed to show a FS of about 2.2, and the limit-equilibrium analyses using residual shear strength resulted in FS = 1.3.

Differences in the relative stiffnesses of the overlying waste as compared to that of the liner interface are also cited by Gilbert and Byrne (1996) as a significant potential cause of deformations along the liner interface that could lead to residual shear strengths.

Similar suppositions are made by Stark et al. (2000), who postulate that strain incompatibility between MSW and underlying interfaces can lead to progressive failure, as they believe was the underlying cause of the Rumpke landfill failure. The weaker lower interfaces may achieve post-peak strengths before the MSW ever achieves peak strength. After peak strength of the interfaces is achieved, the peak strength of the MSW may be mobilized at a time when the strength of the interfaces is reduced to the residual value. They state: "The greater the difference between the stress-strain characteristics of the MSW and the foundation soil or geosynthetic interfaces, the smaller the percentage of [peak] strength mobilized in the MSW and underlying materials." [1]

Unexpected Increases in Pore Pressure

The typical effect of pore pressures is to decrease the effective normal stress, which in turn decreases the effective shear strength, even as the shear stress that is driving instability remains unchanged. When pore pressures are introduced, the effective shear strength may be reduced to the point that the peak shear strength at that location is exceeded, at which point progressive failure can begin. This was what Schmucker and Hendron (1998) concluded was the triggering mechanism for the Rumpke landfill failure.

Seismic Loading

With seismic loading there is certainly the potential for deformation to occur along the critical failure plane, which can reduce the strength of the critical interface below its peak strength. In this regard the design practitioner needs to assess the potential for this type of deformation and, if the design earthquake is expected to produce deformation greater than about 20 mm, then the residual strength of that interface must be considered.

Construction Deformation

Construction conditions frequently result in temporary stability conditions with lower factors of safety than the completed fill scenario. To the author's knowledge, the effect of preliminary interface deformation at low normal loads on the subsequent shear strength at higher normal loads has only been documented in one recent study by Esterhuizen et al. (2001). They showed that for a smooth clay-geomembrane interface, deformations at low normal loads would partially, but not fully, reduce the peak strength of the interface at higher normal loads. They provide a very interesting "work-softening" model to describe this behavior in a manner that can be used in a finite-element analysis. Although their model fits the data very well, it is only applicable to the specific clay and geomembrane used for their study, and it is not know at this time how well their approach would work for other interfaces. This is an area for further research.

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[1] For years now the author has heard the statement that the strain incompatibility between waste and liner systems could be a major consideration in selecting appropriate shear strengths. It is interesting, however, that some of the literature reports surprisingly low amounts of deformation required to reach the peak strength of the waste; on the order of only 40 mm for rigid-body deformation. See, for example, Eid et al. (2000), Stark et al. (1998), Mazzucato et al. (1999). Also Kavazanjian (2001) states his belief that strain compatibility with MSW is not nearly as significant an issue as has generally been supposed, based on direct- and simple-shear test results that show that the strains and deformations required to reach peak strength are comparable to those required for most soils.

Waste and Foundation Settlement

Over time there is substantial deformation and settlement of the waste that may cause unknown redistribution of stresses. The settlement of waste adjacent to a sideslope has often been noted as a source of downdrag forces, which may become great enough to exceed the peak strength of one of the slope liner interfaces. This phenomenon was cited by Stark and Poeppel (1994) as a mechanism contributing to the Kettleman Hills landfill failure, and is echoed in Gilbert and Byrne's (1996) theoretical study: "…it is more likely that the residual strength will be mobilized along the side slope rather than the buttress [bottom liner]", and they even go so far as to say "…it is unlikely that an average stress greater than the residual value could be mobilized along a typical side slope in a containment system." Likewise, foundation settlement has the potential to cause differential movements of the liner system.

Aging and Creep

Geosynthetic durability has been the subject of many papers and studies which address the ability of geosynthetics to maintain their physical properties as containment barriers, and to some extent as tensile reinforcement. Little has been published, however, regarding the long-term durability of shear interfaces such as, for example, the long-term dependence on the strength of geotextile fibers at interfaces with textured geomembranes, or within reinforced GCLs. Quantitative predictions regarding the long-term aging and creep potential of geosynthetic interfaces are certainly beyond the author's capacity, but are noted as an additional potential mechanism whereby the assumed peak strength of an interface might be reduced.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

From the author's experience and his informal polling of industry representatives, two general field observations that have been made regarding deformations along geosynthetic interfaces on slopes:

- Slopes that were designed with robust interfaces using textured geomembrane or granular materials against geosynthetics, have not been observed to undergo tension or deformation.

- Slopes that had less brittle, but also less strong interfaces, such as a geotextile over a smooth geomembrane, have been observed to result in tension in the upper geosynthetic, presumably due to slippage along the interface which occurred as a result of downdrag forces.

It is worthwhile to note in the Gilbert and Byrne (1996) model that strain softening on the slope would generally only occur if the slope angle was greater than the peak friction angle of the lining material. Although unverified by the author, this may be a general guideline for estimating whether or not peak or residual shear strength would occur on a slope (excluding seismic forces). For example, on a 3(H):1(V) slope, perhaps a peak interface strength of 18° or more would maintain its peak strength, and an interface strength of less than that would have a higher potential for going into residual.

Given the large number of landfills constructed with geosynthetic bottom liner systems, it is quite surprising how few failures have actually been reported. Furthermore, none of the reported failures, to the author's knowledge, involved the progressive failure of a substantially brittle geosynthetic interface. Most of those failures have involved soil (including bentonite failures associated with unreinforced GCLs, which are ductile relative to shear strength). The best example of a pure geosynthetic failure that involved some degree of strain softening is the notorious Kettleman Hills failure, but the interfaces in that failure were fairly weak to begin with (all against smooth HDPE), and the initial factor of safety, even assuming peak strengths of the interfaces as they existed, was low, and below standard industry guidelines.

The conclusion of industry observations is that actual industry experience has not shown degradation of peak strength (i.e. progressive failure) to be a pervasive problem. Nonetheless, it definitely presents a potential problem that has on occasion bloomed into an unfortunate reality. It is, therefore, worth taking it into account by means of design and analysis considerations, which are discussed in the next section.

PART 3 - DESIGN APPROACHES

THE PEAK vs. RESIDUAL ISSUE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DESIGN PROCESS

Many elements of a landfill are not designed, per se, but are largely dictated either by the owner's desires or by regulatory constraints. For example, the geometry of a landfill (boundaries, slopes, height, etc.) is often governed by an attempt to maximize the resource (i.e. volume) while meeting the constraints presented by conditional use permits, property line setbacks, maximum slope regulations and the like. Furthermore, the liner system is usually prescribed by regulation, at least in its fundamental requirements, and oftentimes by a default regulatory configuration.

In many cases then, the two major elements that influence a stability analysis are largely predetermined. That is, both the preferred landfill geometry and the liner system are more or less given to the "designer", who is charged with producing the "final design". From the point of view of slope stability, what is there left to do? Obviously the slope stability should be checked and verified. What does this mean and how is it done?

The first step in performing a slope stability analysis is to define the basis of the analysis. This is often documented in the project files as a Design Basis Memorandum (DBM), in which the following kinds of determinations are made:

- Will the analysis look at only the final configuration, or at interim operational configurations as well? (The latter option is highly recommended for risk management.)
- What unit weight will be assumed for the waste?
- What material strength values will be assumed for the different materials, and how will they be determined?
- Which pore-pressure scenarios will be evaluated?
- What will be the minimum acceptable factors of safety?
- Are seismic analyses required? If so, what approach will be used? How is the design earthquake defined? If a deformation approach is used, what is the maximum allowable deformation?

The results of the slope stability analyses will be:

- A static factor of safety (for each configuration analyzed).
- If a seismic analysis is required, the results will present either a potential magnitude of deformation along the critical slip plane, or a factor of safety for a simplified pseudo-static analysis.
- A description of the minimum required interface shear strength properties for the liner system construction.

It is this last point that makes slope stability analyses a design function rather than a mere geotechnical engineering exercise. It is essential that a clear linkage be made between the slope stability calculations and the ultimate project specifications, to ensure that the proper materials are provided during construction to meet the slope stability requirements. If the analysis results do not meet expectations, iterations of laboratory testing and/or alterations in slope geometry and/or liner materials may be required in order to achieve an acceptable design that can be adequately specified.

The design aspect of slope stability analyses becomes even more interesting when an additional constraint is put on the design criteria, namely to position the critical slip surface above the primary geomembrane. This is a common practice in Germany that is also employed by several design practitioners in the United States (and likely in other places as well, given the author's limited knowledge of practices worldwide). This design approach helps to ensure that, if for any reason slippage does occur, the barrier liner system will remain intact. Ensuring that the slip plane is above the primary geomembrane is not necessarily a simple matter; laboratory shear testing programs and iterations of slope stability analyses are often required in order to achieve acceptable results.

Implicit in the slope stability design and analysis process is the need to decide whether peak or residual shear strengths should be used. Though this is not generally an issue for waste materials, which are usually considered ductile, it is often a significant issue for liner system interfaces. This decision will significantly influence the calculated factor of safety. For seismic analyses, the influence is often less significant, because if the seismic analysis indicates deformation will occur, a prudent designer will use a post-peak shear strength (even as the question remains whether to use a deformation-based post-peak strength, or a true residual strength).

WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE FACTOR OF SAFETY?

The author previously co-authored a paper whose title posed this same question concerning cover systems (Liu et al., 1997). That paper discussed assessing the degree of confidence in each of the variables that went into assessing the factor of safety, and assessing the potential risk and cost of a failure. This approach is espoused by Gilbert (pers. comm.) who believes that the factor of safety should be based on "uncertainties, assumptions, and the consequences of failure."

It is common in the literature to see geotechnical references that reiterate the idea that the greatest degree of uncertainty in performing slope stability analyses is the shear strength of the materials (e.g. Liu et al, 1997; Stark and Poeppel, 1994; Duncan, 1996). Given that the factor of safety is a reflection of uncertainty, it should logically reflect the degree of uncertainty in the shear strength properties. This was clearly noted by Terzaghi and Peck (1948, pg. 106):

> "The practical consequences of the observed differences between real soils and their ideal substitutes must be compensated by adequate factors of safety."

A commonly accepted value for the factor of safety in geotechnical engineering slope stability analyses is FS $\geq$ 1.5. Many engineers blindly accept this value while remaining ignorant of its basis. The origin of this value was the empirical result of analyzing the relative success and failure of dams that have been constructed over the past century. Experience proved that when an analysis was performed correctly, assuming reasonable and prudent material properties, an earthen structure with a factor of safety of 1.5 can be expected to remain stable even when some of its structural geometry and material properties have varied from those assumed in the analysis. Similarly, other values for an acceptable factor of safety have been established as general industry practice for other types of problems, such as bearing capacity (required FS generally between 2 and 5) or drainage applications (FS generally ranging from 1 to 20 depending on the problem).

It is also fundamental to the establishment of generally accepted factors of safety that analyses are performed correctly, and are based on prudent assumptions regarding material properties, geometry, unit weights, and pore pressures. Factors of safety are not intended to compensate for engineering errors or omissions. Indeed, the author has evaluated failures where the design factor of safety exceeded 1.5, which means that the original design neglected to take into account one or more critical factors.

With containment lining systems we meet a unique opportunity. We have a greater ability to know where the potential critical slip plane is, and can measure its shear strength characteristics more accurately than we can in a number of traditional geotechnical problems. We have far more knowledge of the geometry and shear strengths than when we are confronted with a natural slope, for example. Knowing where slippage is most likely to occur, we have to assess the implications for deformation. As described previously in this paper, we often don't really know if some deformation will occur, but experience from many analogous failures, along with the process of deduction, tells us that it *could* occur. Knowing this, we should at least be prepared to use the post-peak shear strength of the surface having the lowest peak strength.

SPECIFIC APPROACHES

Some specific design approaches, which the author has himself employed, are summarized below. This does not imply that others approaches do not exist, but simply that this paper is based on the author's experience.

1. <u>The Most Conservative Approach – Force the Slip Plane Above the Geomembrane and Use Residual Shear Strengths Everywhere the Slip Plane Occurs in the Liner System</u>. A simple and common way of achieving this objective is to use single-side textured geomembrane for the primary liner, and then cover it with a geotextile or geonet product. In nearly every case the author has been involved with (save a few inevitable exceptions), single-sided textured geomembrane (textured side down, of course) always caused whatever slippage occurred to take place on the top surface of the geomembrane, if it was covered with another geosynthetic. Even when directly covered by a granular material, it was often possible to make the bottom (textured) interface stronger than the smooth geomembrane/granular soil interface. In our experience there is often not a large difference between the peak and residual shear strength on smooth geomembrane interfaces with either other geosynthetics or granular soils, and these interfaces would not be considered very brittle. There may be some exceptions, such as a smooth HDPE geomembrane against a wet clay as described by Filz et al. (2001) for the Kettleman Hills failure analysis.

Some designs may need greater shear strength for interim construction and operational conditions than can be provided by a smooth geomembrane surface, so a double-sided textured geomembrane may be required. In this case the design condition of having the weak interface above the primary geomembrane may still be achieved by specifying a more aggressive texturing on the lower side of the geomembrane (see shear data presented in Figure 4).

If a designer is able to use the residual shear strength of the upper geomembrane interface and achieve acceptable factors of safety, this design can be very safe from the point of view of both stability and environmental containment. This approach is favored by Hullings and Sansome (1997), who recommend: "If possible, provide a slip plane and a stress-free geomembrane."

If true residual shear strengths are used for the analysis, and those strengths are measured with a degree of confidence that they represent worst case for the liner system interfaces, it follows that a lower-than-typical factor of safety can be allowed. Gilbert and Byrne (1996) suggest that a factor of safety simply greater than unity may be an adequate design criterion for analyses that assume residual shear strengths are the only strengths mobilized along the entire slip surface. Part of Gilbert's rationale (personal communication, 2001) is that even if a failure were induced for a slope analyzed with this criterion, things could not degenerate quickly, presuming the analysis were properly performed. The slope could subsequently be monitored and measures taken to reduce the deformation rate, if deemed necessary.

A similar recommendation is given by Stark et al. (1998): "…strain incompatibility can facilitate the development of slope instability because the geosynthetic interface may mobilize a post-peak or residual strength while the waste is mobilizing a strength that is significantly below the peak strength. This can be incorporated into a design by assigning a residual strength to the critical interface or slip surface and requiring a factor of safety, FS>1…Because field interface displacements and *effect(s) of progressive failure are not known [emphasis by author]*, a factor of safety, FS>1 with a ring shear residual interface strength assigned to all potential slip surfaces should be satisfied in addition to meeting regulatory requirements."

Filz et al. (2001) suggest that if true residual shear strengths are used for the analysis, then whatever factor of safety would normally be deemed appropriate for a given project could be reduced by the following reduction factor (*RF*):

$$RF = \tau_r / [\tau_r + 0.1(\tau_p - \tau_r)]$$

Where τ_r = residual shear strength, and τ_p = peak shear strength. They imply that the normally appropriate factor of safety would be determined based on considerations of uncertainty and consequences as described by Duncan (2000). Also, it should be noted that their discussion and recommendations were restricted to smooth-geomembrane/clay interfaces.

2. <u>Safe Approach – Use Residual Shear Strength of the Interface with the Lowest Peak Strength</u>. This approach could be the same as the above approach if the interface having the lowest shear strength happens to be above the primary geomembrane. If, due to overall slope stability constraints, the interface with the lowest peak strength is below the primary geomembrane (e.g. weak subgrade interface), this approach will still result in a very safe design relative to slope stability. It could, however, be less conservative in terms of environmental containment should deformation occur, causing a tear in the primary geomembrane. This approach is recommended by Gilbert and Byrne (1996) who "strongly recommended that the potential for instability be explored in a limit equilibrium analysis using residual strengths along all interfaces….It is strongly recommended that a factor of safety greater than one be achieved in all containment system slope designs, assuming residual strengths are mobilized along the entire slip surface."

   The same degree of factor of safety for this approach would apply as for Approach # 1 above. Holley et al. (1997) reported using residual shear strengths for a critical surface below the primary geomembrane in a steep canyon landfill, and obtaining operating factors of safety of 1.2 and an ultimate factor of safety of 1.4 for the final build-out. It is not clear if these were their minimum design criteria, or simply the results that they accepted.

3. <u>Brute Strength Approach</u> – This approach would employ very aggressive texturing to achieve high interface strengths, although the assumed strengths may be prorated by some factor to account for variability. The need to occasionally use this approach is suggested by Hullings and Sansome (1997): "Overall slope stability conditions often do not allow low interface strengths, so the interface strengths above the geomembrane cannot be much lower than the interface strength on the underside of the geomembrane."

   If the approach of high interface strength is used everywhere, and seismic analysis shows no deformation, an acceptable design basis may be to use peak shear strength with an adequately high factor of safety. How high is adequate is difficult to say, because the theoretical possibility of progressive failure still exists. The finite-element study performed by Filz et al. (2001) indicates that FS > 2 should be required for analyses based on peak strength of smooth-geomembrane/clay interfaces.

We have only the record of successful designs that were constructed based on peak strength to testify that the brute strength approach may be valid, but this does not demonstrate that it is conservative. The analysis should account for potential leachate build-up under worst case assumptions, for example after a post-closure maintenance period with substantial leachate still being generated, and the operations or leachate-collection layer completely clogged. Check that a submerged condition at the toe does not result in a reduction in shear strength (due to reduction in effective normal stresses) to the point that it fails the peak strength at the toe, which could lead to progressive failure through the rest of the fill (such as that discussed by Schmucker and Hendron, 1998).

4. Hybrid Approaches

a) *Use Residual on the Side Slope and Peak on the Base*. To the author's knowledge, this approach was first documented in the literature by Stark and Poeppel (1994) in their review of the notorious Kettleman Hills failure. As they so aptly stated: "…it appears that peak and residual interface strengths should be assigned to the base and sideslopes, respectively, for design purposes." This was later echoed by Jones and Dixon (1998) from the U.K., who stated: "In some instances residual values may be appropriate on the side slope where large displacements are anticipated, used together with peak values on the base." In the author's opinion, this approach is a strong qualifier for accepting a traditional factor of safety in the range of 1.5 for ultimate build-out conditions (assuming unexpected pore-pressure scenarios are included in the evaluation), and 1.3 for operations.

b) *Use Post-Peak Strength Values that Anticipate a Limited Amount of Deformation*. Shear strength reductions may occur due to relative deformations during construction, landfill operations, and waste settlement, but these deformations may be less than those which would lead to the minimum residual shear strength conditions. Also, based on their observation of numerous apparently successful facilities, design practitioners may consider peak shear strengths with an adequate factor of safety to be valid designs, while still wishing to incorporate an additional degree of conservatism by reducing the measured peak strength of the geosynthetic interfaces. These strength reductions would be applied to the side slope as well as the base. Use of this approach is suggested by Filz et al. (2001), who suggest using a mobilized strength that is higher than the residual by about 10% of the increment from residual to peak strength, and applying an appropriate factor of safety to this based on reliability concepts as described by Duncan (2000).

c) *Use Lower Waste Shear Strengths*. From the observation of trends published in the literature, shear strengths of 30° or more are commonly used for municipal solid waste. This level of shear strength has been documented as being generally conservative (e.g. Kavazanjian, 2001), but may require some amount of strain to become fully mobilized. As an approach to stability analyses designers may wish to reduce the mobilized strength of the waste material to more closely match the strain compatibility of the liner system.

The author has used all the above approaches in his own practice, which over the years has been based on improved levels of understanding. Currently (subject to change!) the author employs a combination of Approach #1 and #4 as his standard practice. That is, he usually defines a "design condition" which he believes will be the actual long-term conditions that interface shear strengths will experience. The decision as to what long-term shear strengths he selects is project-specific (there are many variations), and a complete discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the decision is usually related to the criteria described for Approach #4. Next, the author follows the advice of Gilbert and Byrne (1996) and checks that the stability under the worst-case shear strength conditions (e.g. hydrated residual shear strength) results in FS > 1.0. This latter test is often the more significant.

A good example of the above approach is for bottom liner designs that involve the encapsulation of unreinforced bentonite between two geomembranes. The design scenario argues that most of the bentonite will remain dry for at least several centuries, and the basic slope stability analysis is performed on this basis. A second analysis is performed, however, to verify that the stability factor of safety is greater than unity even when all of the bentonite is under fully hydrated residual shear strength conditions. This example is more fully described in Thiel et al. (2001).

PART 4 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

- Many geosynthetic interfaces are highly strain-softening (i.e. "brittle"). The most common example is a textured geomembrane against some form of geotextile (whether it be a cushion, part of a geonet composite, or a GCL).

- There are mechanisms that can lead to exceedence of peak strength even though a correctly-performed slope stability analysis predicts a factor of safety greater than one. Examples of these mechanisms include:

  - Non-uniform mobilized stress distribution.

- Relative differences in stiffness between waste and liner materials.
- Unexpected pore pressures.
- Seismic loading.
- Deformation during construction.
- Waste settlement.
- Foundation settlement.
- Aging and creep of the geosynthetics.

➢ Exceedence of peak strength in a brittle interface can result in progressive failure.

➢ Based on field observation, most facilities designed with aggressive interface shear strengths are not experiencing post-peak shear strength, which means that the working shear stress is probably less than or equal to the peak strength. Only a few examples of progressive failure along geosynthetic interfaces have occurred in the industry, and these have not been along highly brittle interfaces, which means that the projects did not have high factors of safety to begin with, even assuming peak interface strengths.

➢ Several design approaches have been used over the years and the standard-of-practice is evolving. In the United States a preferred approach has not yet clearly emerged.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

➢ Designers and CQA firms should conduct material-specific testing of interfaces to verify that the materials specified and/or supplied for a project are realistic and meet the design requirements. Whoever commissions the testing should possess a skilled familiarity with the design objectives as well as the testing technique.

➢ Designers should attempt to position the critical slip plane above the primary geomembrane to the extent feasible for a given project. If a double-sided textured geomembrane is required for construction or operational stability, attempt to specify more aggressive texturing on the under side of the geomembrane.

➢ Using peak shear strengths on the landfill base, and residual shear strengths on the side slopes appears to be a successful state-of-the-practice in many situations.

➢ Designers should consider evaluating all facilities for stability using the residual shear strength along the geosynthetic interface that has the lowest peak strength. This would be an advisable risk-management practice for designers, even if the FS under these conditions is simply greater than unity.

- Regardless of the design assumptions, specify soil spreading by pushing up-slope only, and require close monitoring of LCRS and operations soil placement on slopes during construction to verify that relative shear displacement does not occur during construction. Exceptions to this practice should be allowed only with field tests and CQA verification.

- If LCRS or operations soils are placed as part of landfill operations, designers should assume the worst and automatically assume residual side-slope shear strength conditions will occur (and extra leakage rates as well). The reason for this is that construction by landfill operators is usually not controlled and monitored closely.

- Check stability for a potential leachate buildup, especially near the toe of the landfill.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- More finite element analyses at an academic level, such as those performed by Reddy et al. (1996) and Filz et al. (2001) would be warranted, to gain a better understanding of the threshold beyond which localized stress distributions might cause exceedence of peak shear resistance. Refinements in the analyses would include modeling the strain-softening behavior of the geosynthetic interfaces, and checking different types of interfaces and geometries. The results of these analyses might prove useful for establishing guidelines as to when peak strengths might be exceeded and when they might be maintained. Ultimately, the author envisions correlations between the FS determined by limit equilibrium analyses, ratios of peak interface strengths to waste fill strengths, and relative stiffnesses (somewhat as proposed by Gilbert and Byrne (1996), but more specific and less general), being used to estimate when and where peak vs. post-peak strengths would be reached at the interfaces.

- The monitoring of slope deformation on geosynthetic interfaces that are being buried by waste is recommended. One fairly easy way to do this would be to use the simple tell-tale technique employed for the Cincinnati cover demonstration project (Koerner et al., 1996), though this would require participation by landfill owners and operators. This avenue of research echoes that suggested by Gilbert and Byrne (1996), who state: “Future research should focus on measuring deformations and mobilized shear resistances in existing waste containment facilities.”

- The monitoring of pore pressures in the LCRS above liner systems, with the reporting of the worst-case conditions, would provide valuable information regarding long term conditions in landfills. Unfortunately, any high pressures would likely result in a permit violation at many facilities, so it is improbable that an existing owner will voluntarily monitor high pressures, much less report them. We are therefore left with only orphan or Superfund sites as a possible basis for monitoring. Because of this limitation, participation in international waste conferences is increasingly valuable.

- Additional laboratory testing, conducted on various types of interfaces, would be useful to assess the impact of interface deformations at low normal loads on the peak strength reductions at higher normal loads.

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