

Effect of sewage sludge and rock dust on strength and workability of concrete

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ABSTRACT

The production of sewage sludge originating from municipal wastewater treatment plants has increased significantly. Sludge is considered the largest byproduct of wastewater in volume, whose process and disposal is considered one of the most complex environmental problems. This paper reports experimental findings regarding the feasibility of using sewage sludge in concrete as an alternative to freshwater varying from 0 to 100% by weight. The concrete samples were studied with regard to compressive strength and workability. The results showed that sludge can be replaced up to 50% by weight of water without any significant deterioration of mechanical properties. To reinforce concrete strength, rock dust was added to concrete as an alternative to the whole fine aggregates. According to the findings, the presence of rock dust had beneficial effects on compressive strength, whose samples with 50% sludge were relatively better in terms of compressive strength than the normal concretes. Furthermore, the effect of rock dust on concrete workability was negligible. In addition to environmental preservation, the use of both sewage sludge and rock dust in concrete could save a large amount of freshwater and prevent further depletion of natural aggregates respectively. Moreover, it is a measure for sludge disposal and resource recovery.

Key words | compressive strength, concrete, rock dust, sewage sludge, workability

INTRODUCTION

Current concerns about scientific emphasis on environmental pollution and global pollution issues, there is an increasing awareness of efficient and safe wastewater disposal. Properties of sewage sludge and its byproducts are investigated as a part of environmental problems (Oakes 2004). Approximately 99% of initial wastewater stream in wastewater treatment plants is discharged as treated water and the remainder is a dilute suspension of solids, commonly known as sludge (Barrera-Díaza *et al.* 2011). Sludge is an inevitable byproduct of wastewater treatment processes which is generally generated at a rate of 70–90 g/person equivalent per day (Pescod 1992; Tamrabet *et al.* 2009; Tamrabet). The presence of pollutants and unstable pathogen which leads to potential health and environmental

hazards is a matter of crucial importance (Mohammad & Athamneh 2004; Ahmad *et al.* 2006). The most widely used final disposal method of sludge is discharge into landfills, which is considered detrimental to the soil and urban landscape (Hoffman 2000).

The ideas of using sludge as a component of cement (Onaka 2000; Taruya *et al.* 2002), in making building blocks and panels, in the paper and pulp industry (Zelic 2005), in the creation of hempcrete combined with cellulose fibers in the cement matrix, are considered useful methods of sludge disposal (Eires & Jalali 2005). Incinerator sewage sludge ash with pozzolanic properties which is submitted to acid washing, has the potential to be used in construction products as well (Shahul Hameed & Sekar 2009; Donatello

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et al. 2010). Using pulverized sludge ash as a partial replacement for cement and reclaimed wastewater as mixing water for concrete could be regarded as a means of waste disposal and resource recovery (Joo 1989; Joo & Kuan 1994; Valls *et al.* 2004; Yagüe *et al.* 2005; Noruzman *et al.* 2012; Lina *et al.* 2012). Physical and mechanical properties and durability of concrete with added dry sewage sludge that have been studied concluded that up to 10% of treatment plant sludge can be added to concrete for specific uses and in some cases for low-strength mass concrete that could be used for bases and sub-bases of roads with light traffic, as a filler, etc. (Mohammad & Athamneh 2004; Malliou *et al.* 2007; Mun 2007). In some cases, processed wastewater sludge can be used to improve the mechanical properties of concrete. Moreover, the presence of sludge in concrete with using coagulants or treating electrochemical treatment method has beneficial effects on the long-term properties (Barrera-Díaza *et al.* 2011).

On the other hand, the production of concrete requires a large amount of water and only freshwater is used in most of its production. In fact, approximately 800 and 825 billion liters of water were used in the production of concrete during the years 1997 and 2010 respectively, at an average of 250 kg of cement per 1 m³ of concrete with a water/cement ratio (Aïtcin 2000). While this is regarded as a country with little precipitation and high demand for water is on the increase day by day (Khanlou *et al.* 2010), 80 million cubic meters of concrete with average compressive grade of 250 kg per m³ is produced with 1,000 million cubic meters of water annually. Therefore, alternatives for concrete mixing water is necessary due to the higher consumption of freshwater caused by global population growth and industrialization.

The presence of sludge impurities in mixing water of concrete affect its strength and durability (Lee *et al.* 2001); thus washed rock dust was chosen as an alternative to fine aggregates to evaluate the possibility of its use to overcome these properties.

The available sources of natural sand are becoming depleted due to excessive extraction of natural aggregates for using in construction industry (Nagabhushana & Sharada bai 2011). The continued use of river sand in concrete poses serious problems with respect to its availability, cost and environmental impact (Ilangovana *et al.* 2008). Hence,

some investigations have been carried out to eliminate the aforementioned concerns and evaluate the effect of rock dust on mechanical properties of concretes.

With respect to the use of quarry rock dust in concrete as an alternative to fine aggregates, Sahar *et al.* (2003) reported a significant increase in compressive strength, modulus of rupture and split tensile strength by 40% when replaced with Quarry Rock Dust. Ilangovana & Nagabhushana (2006) concluded that the full replacement of natural sand with quarry rock dust is possible with proper treatment of quarry dust before utilization.

Based on two other researches, it was found out that the compressive, flexural and durability studies of concrete made of quarry rock dust were nearly 10 and 14% more than the conventional concrete, respectively (Ilangovana *et al.* 2008; Nagabhushana & Sharada bai 2011). Stone Crusher dust could be an effective alternative to fine aggregates in paving blocks (50%) (Nanda Radhikesh *et al.* 2010), and in mortars and concrete (up to 40%), with negligible effects on mechanical properties (Nagabhushana & Sharada bai 2011).

Several efforts have been made to use composites of water treatment sludge with different types of wastes. Mechanical properties of concretes produced with a composite of water treatment sludge and sawdust characterized it as a lightweight non-structural concrete (Sales *et al.* 2010, 2011). The joint addition of water treatment sludge and recycled concrete rubble aggregates has been proven to be a feasible recycling alternative from the viewpoint of axial compression strength, modulus of elasticity, water absorption and tensile strength (Sales & Rodrigues de Souza 2009). In development of lightweight aggregate using dry sewage sludge, coal ash could be used to improve compressive strength and sintering temperature due to high contents of SiO₂ and Al₂O₃ (Wanga *et al.* 2009).

The objective of this research was to study the mechanical properties of concrete produced with a composite based on sewage sludge and rock dust, instead of water and fine aggregates respectively. The use of this composite may offer a good alternative to the recycling of sewage sludge and rock powder, contributing to the reduction of environmental impacts caused by sludge discharge into the environment, depletion of natural sand in order to be used as fine aggregates and economical aspect of consuming sludge instead of freshwater in concretes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cement

Ordinary Portland cement II was used throughout. Table 1 presents the chemical compositions and physical properties of the cement.

Aggregates

The aggregates used include crushed granite stones and naturally occurring river-washed quartz sand which were well-graded by means of 12.5, 19.25, 9.5 and 4.75 mm sieves and 9.5, 4.75, 2.36, 1.18, 0.6, 0.3 and 0.15 mm sieves respectively, according to ASTM C136-06 (ASTM 1996). Physical aggregate properties are given in Table 2.

Table 1 | Chemical composition and physical properties of the cement

Chemical properties	Average value
Specific gravity	3.15
Initial setting	30/45
Normal consistency	0/28
SiO ₂	72/05
Al ₂ O ₃	5/18
Fe ₂ O ₃	3/7
CaO	62/18
MgO	2/18
SO ₃	1/96
Na ₂ O	0/47
K ₂ O	0/5
Loss on ignition	3/41
Fineness	4/51
Free SO ₃	10/93

Property	Sand
Specific gravity	2.725
Bulk density (Kg/m ³)	1,912
Absorption (%)	0.272
Fine particles < 0.063 mm (%)	9

Figures 1 and 2 show the particle size distribution of coarse and fine aggregates.

Rock dust

Exporting white rock dust with fineness modulus of 2.80 is used in this study. Figure 3 shows particle size distribution of rock dust.

Sources and analysis of sewage sludge samples

The sludge used in the development and production of the concretes was obtained from Ghaz wastewater treatment plant in Iran. The treatment plant, with a treatment

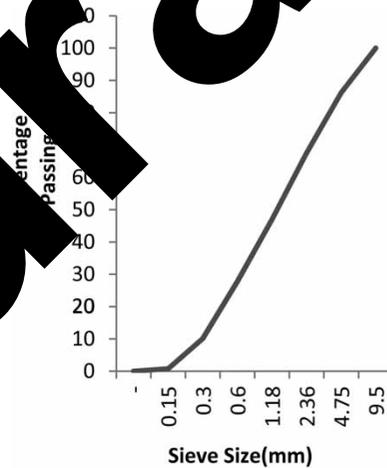


Figure 1 | Particle size distribution for fine aggregates.

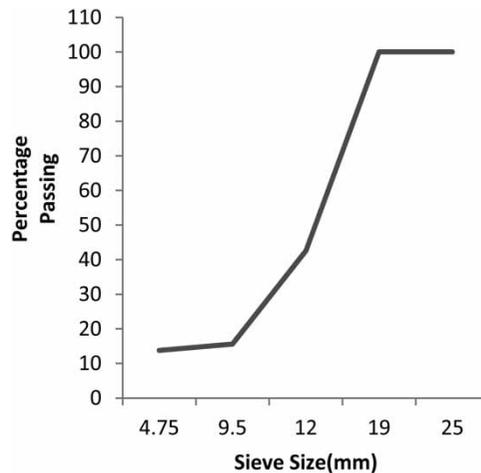


Figure 2 | Particle size distribution for Coarse aggregates.

Withhold draft

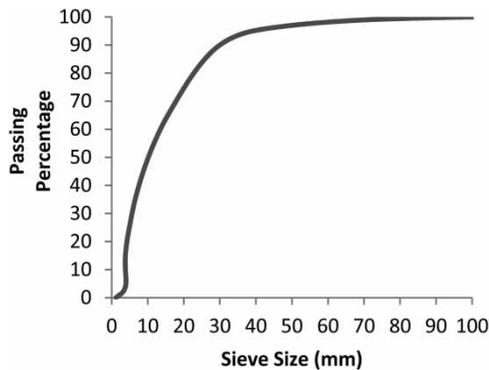


Figure 3 | Particle size distribution for rock dust.

capacity of 85,000 people, is located in the west of Tehran, with an area of 13 hectares. It has been in operation since 2008. The treatment method of this plant is the activated sludge. The total amount of excess sludge in ordinary (days without rain) and in maximum conditions (rainy days) is 247 and 502 m³/day respectively.

'Municipal Sewage Sludge Management Plan' carried out by Torabian & Moumeni (2003), a case study on Shah Qods Treatment Plant, was used which studied physical, chemical and biological properties of the sludge [41].

The samples were collected in plastic containers and stored in a cool place. Lime was added to each container to maintain a pH of 12 for 24 hours before being used in concrete to ensure a majority of microorganisms. Sludge samples were subjected to chemical analysis using ICP-OES. The results are presented in Table 3.

Concrete mix design

For preparing concrete specimens, waste water sludge, potable water, Portland cement (PCC) and coarse aggregates and rock dust were used. For each cubic meter of concrete, concrete mix proportions were given as shown in Table 4. Four different series of specimens were prepared; C-C, C-C+RD, C-C+RD+SS, and C-RD. C-C means 'Controlled Concrete', C-C+RD means 'Concrete with Sludge', RD stands for rock dust, and C-RD-S means concrete containing rock dust and sludge.

Water/cement ratio and cement grade were fixed at 0.45 and 350 kg/m³ respectively. Aggregates were graded with sieve series before being used in concretes.

Different percentages (25, 50, 75 and 100%) of sewage sludge replaced water to measure 7, 28 and 90-day

Table 3 | Elemental composition of the sludge

Element	Content (%)
Ca	20.57
Si	14.13
Fe	2.13
P	0.13
Al	4.13
Mg	1.86
K	1.22
Ti	0.899
Na	0.729
S	0.424
Zn	0.265
Cl	0.224
Sr	0.148
Mn	0.130
Cu	0.0758
Ba	0.0357
C	0.0229
O	2.86

compressive strength. Concrete compression in molds was performed by a vibration table (Neville 2005).

Curing of specimens

Casted specimens were left for a day in mold in a humid laboratory condition ($23 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$). Then, they were removed and immersed in water for 7, 28 and 90 days.

All blocks were prepared and maintained in the same conditions. In other words, parameters such as concrete compression, mixture rate, temperature, humidity, cement type and grading of coarse and fine aggregates in all tests were considered fixed (Leung *et al.* 2003). Samples were placed in a humid environment for 24 hours. Therewith, all concrete cubes were maintained in potable water for different durations (7, 28 and 90 days) to cure.

Compressive strength and workability tests

The slump of fresh concretes was measured according to ASTM C143-90a (1998) and the compressive strength of

Table 4 | Mixture proportions of the concrete (kg/m³)

Samples	Cement (kg)	Water (L)	Fine aggregate (kg)	Coarse aggregate (kg)	Sludge (kg)	Rock dust (kg)	Additive (kg)	Admixture (kg)
C-C	350	157.5	1,135.5	757	–	–	1.05	
C-RD	350	157.5	–	757	–	1,135.5		
C-S25	350	118.125	1,135.5	757	39.375	–	1.05	
C-S50	350	78.75	1,135.5	757	78.75	–	1.05	
C-S75	350	39.375	1,135.5	757	118.125	–	1.05	
C-S100	350	157.5	1,135.5	757	157.5	–	1.05	
C-RD-S25	350	39.375	–	757	39.375	1,135.5		
C-RD-S50	350	78.75	–	757	78.75	1,135.5		
C-RD-S75	350	118.125	–	757	118.125	1,135.5		
C-RD-S100	350	157.5	–	757	157.5	1,135.5		

samples was determined based on ASTM C109-99 (1999). In all curing times, two samples were tested for compressive strength and their average value was obtained as compressive strength.

A compressive strength test was carried out to determine the ultimate strength that causes concrete to fail in compression. Concrete cube specimens that had been cured for 7, 28 and 90 days were tested to compressive strength. The specimens were removed from the curing tank and allowed to dry, after which they were placed in a compression machine and a compressive load was applied until failure. The load at failure was used to compute the compressive strength shown in the following equation:

$$\text{Compressive strength} = \frac{\text{Failure load (N)}}{\text{Cube cross-sectional area (m}^2\text{)}}$$

For the slump test, a slump cone placed on a horizontal flat slab, filled with fresh concrete in four layers, each layer being tamped 25 times with a tamping rod. Excess concrete beyond the cone top was removed and the surface smoothed using a trowel. The cone was vertically pulled from the mold concrete and placed beside the slumped concrete. A tamping rod was placed horizontally on the top of slump cone and a ruler was used to measure the concrete slump (ASTM 1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Slump analysis

Various alternatives of Qods' sludge disposal can be studied. The first option is burning which is not suitable due to several reasons such as the air pollution of Tehran and the high cost of constructing and maintaining incinerators (Abbaspour & Soltaninejad 2004; Fytili & Zabaniotou 2006; Kanitha *et al.* 2014).

The alternative of sludge disposal with wastes to landfills cannot be considered due to the high volumes of municipal waste produced in Tehran, as well as the great expense of transportation.

The third option, composting, could not be applied from the view point of economy, inefficient management and the increasing trend of air pollution. Therefore, finding a feasible alternative to environmentally proper disposal of sludge is necessary.

According to the results of 'Municipal Sewage Sludge Management Plan' (Torabian & Moumeni 2003), based on US EPA standards and regulations, the resulting sludge holds the qualities of class B pathogenically. It indicates that stabilization of sewage sludge is not implemented well in this treatment plant. Consequently, the application of sludge in concrete with adding some lime to kill microorganisms will be an advantageous option for sludge disposal to the environment.

Because of the physical–chemical processes that are involved in activated wastewater sludge treatment, sludge tends to accumulate heavy metals existing in the wastewater. Concentration of heavy metals in sewage sludge may vary widely, depending on the sludge origins (Fytili & Zabaniotou 2006). Regarding the values of heavy metals studied in the present research and the aforementioned plan, it bears an exceptionally excellent quality. The main reason for the low level of heavy metals in sludge samples can be related to the absence of industrial units in the vicinity of Qods treatment plant. Subsequently, the usage of sludge in concrete could be environmentally practicable regarding the potential leakage of heavy

metals from concrete (Torabian & Moumeni 2003). In addition, an insignificant amount of heavy metals leakage from concretes containing municipal wastewater sludge, which has been studied specifically by other researchers, can be attributed to the slow and gradual dissolution process. Moreover, the immobilization effect of cement on heavy metals should be taken into account (Khalilzadeh Shirazi & Torabian 2012).

Workability

Figure 4 presents the slump test results. The values were within the range of 1.8–4.0 cm and total trends seem to be on the decrease in general. The presence of sludge solid particles in the mixing water for concrete was observed to have an influence on slump (Chakreera & Lertwattanakruk 2009). The maximum decrease was observed in concretes with 25 and 50% sludge which were almost equal to the referenced samples. The values obtained from sludge and rock dust yielded similar values compared with samples containing only sewage sludge in all different percentages. However, this reduction is negligible.

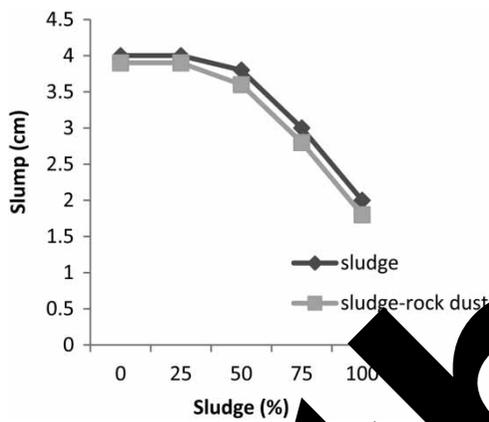


Figure 4 | Slump varied according to the sludge content.

Compressive strength

The compressive strength values of the concretes are presented in Figure 5 for 7, 28 and 90 days. The values for

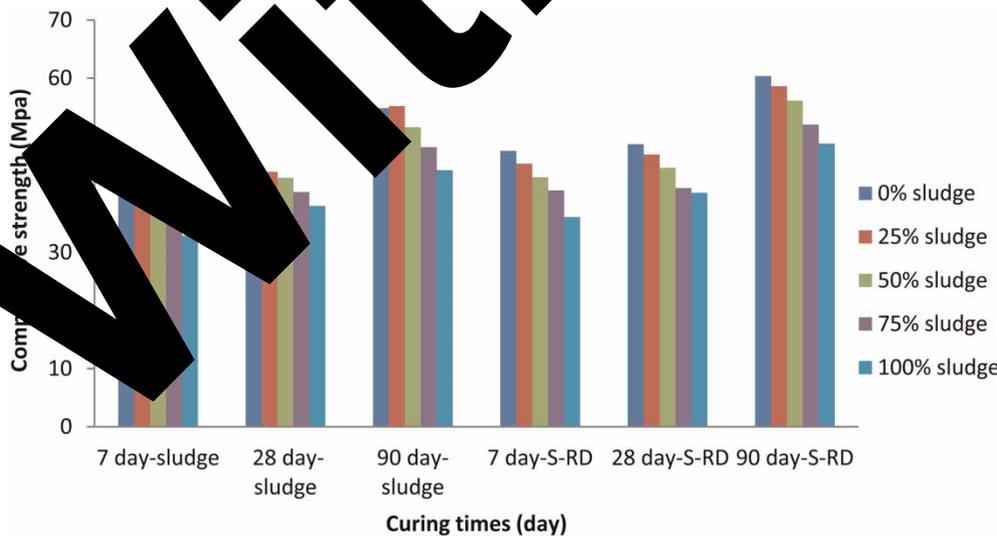


Figure 5 | Compressive strength according to the sludge and rock powder content with three different curing times.

concretes with sludge varied from about 33 to 55 MPa, while samples with sludge and rock dust fluctuate between 36 and 58.5 MPa. This means that strengths of specimens were improved by using rock dust, which enhanced the decreasing effects of sewage sludge on compressive strength of concretes. In general, all samples containing sludge with or without rock dust diminished their values with quantity progressively. Such behavior can be related to the presence of non-degradable organic matter in the sludge (Barrera-Díaza *et al.* 2011).

While the strength values of concretes without sludge showed a moderate increase with time, these amounts for specimens containing rock dust developed and showed higher quantities than the former ones. Moreover, the presence of rock dust in samples with 25 and 50% sludge as an alternative to freshwater provided more reinforcement compared to the conventional concretes (without sludge and rock dust). This reveals the increasing effect of rock dust on the compressive strength of concrete.

CONCLUSION

The production of concrete with the joint addition of sewage sludge and rock dust can offer an appealing alternative that is favorable from the standpoint of compression strength and workability. Sludge can be used in concrete mixing with up to 50% and can even increase compressive strength if rock dust is used instead of aggregate. In other words, experimentally manufactured samples with recommended composite have been superior in compressive strength compared to conventional ones. The workability of fresh concretes presents a downward trend in both usages of sludge, and this composite of sludge and rock dust. However, this downward is insignificant up to 50% replacement of sludge, and the impact of rock dust is also considered negligible.

The production of concrete with a composite based on sewage sludge and rock dust can be effective from the viewpoint of environmental pollution control and natural resources conservation including freshwater and river aggregates.

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