International Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management (IJSREM)
Volume: 08 Issue: 11 | Nov - 2024 SJIF Rating: 8.448 ISSN: 2582-3930

Study of Papercrete as a Sustainable Building Material

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***Abstract** - Papercrete is an eco-friendly composite material comprising waste paper, cement, and sand, gaining attention as a sustainable alternative in construction. This research examines its mechanical and physical properties, including compressive strength, thermal insulation, and water absorption, alongside its environmental impact and practical applications. The study also highlights the challenges and future prospects of papercrete, advocating its role in green construction practices.*

I. Introduction

The construction industry contributes approximately 39% of global carbon emissions, necessitating innovative solutions to minimize environmental impact. Sustainable construction materials such as papercrete present a pathway to reducing resource depletion, lowering energy consumption, and managing waste. Papercrete combines ordinary cement, sand, and waste paper, creating a lightweight material with potential applications in non-load-bearing construction.

This study aims to:

- Evaluate the mechanical and thermal properties of papercrete.
- Analyze its environmental benefits.
- Address challenges and explore its suitability for practical applications.

II. Materials & Methodology

2.1 Composition of Papercrete

Papercrete consists of the following materials:

- **Cement:** Acts as a primary binder, typically Ordinary Portland Cement (OPC).
- **Waste Paper:** Recycled paper waste forms the bulk of the material.
- **Sand:** Enhances stability and compressive strength.

2.2 Mix Ratios

Common mix ratios are:

i. Paper: Cement: Sand = 3:1:1 (lightweight, insulating applications).

ii. Paper: Cement: Sand = 4:2:1 (higher strength applications).

2.3 Preparation Process

i. **Paper Pulping:** Waste paper is shredded and soaked in water for 24 hours before being pulped.

ii. **Mixing:** Pulp, cement, sand, and water are mixed until a uniform consistency is achieved.

iii. **Moulding and Curing:** The mixture is poured into Molds, set for 24 hours, and cured for 7–28 days to gain strength.

2.4 Testing Parameters

i. **Compressive Strength:** Measured using a Universal Testing Machine (UTM) to determine the material’s load-bearing capacity.

ii. **Thermal Insulation:** Tested using heat transfer methods to quantify its insulating properties.

iii. **Water Absorption:** Evaluated by immersing cured samples in water for 24 hours.

2.5. Discussion

2.5.1 Compressive Strength

- Papercrete's compressive strength ranges from 1 MPa to 5 MPa, significantly lower than conventional concrete. This makes it unsuitable for load-bearing walls but ideal for partitions and filler applications.

2.5.2 Thermal Properties

- Papercrete exhibits low thermal conductivity (~0.05–0.1 W/m·K), making it an excellent insulator. This property enhances its suitability for energy-efficient building designs.

2.5.3 Water Absorption

- The high porosity of papercrete results in water absorption rates exceeding 20%, requiring external waterproofing for durability in exposed conditions.

2.5.4 Cost Analysis

- Papercrete production costs are 20-30% lower than traditional concrete due to the use of recycled materials and reduced cement content.

2.6. Applications

Papercrete has various applications, including:

1. **Non-Load-Bearing Walls:** Lightweight and thermally efficient, suitable for internal partitions.
2. **Insulation Panels:** High insulation properties make it suitable for green building envelopes.
3. **Temporary Structures:** Ideal for disaster relief shelters and temporary housing due to quick fabrication and cost-effectiveness.

III. Challenges

3.1 Challenges Faced

i. **Low Strength:** Its compressive strength limits its use to non-load-bearing applications.

ii. **Water Resistance:** High absorption rates necessitate the use of sealants or additives for waterproofing.

iii. **Durability:** Prone to degradation under prolonged exposure to moisture.

iv. **Lack of Standardization:** Absence of defined standards for composition, testing, and application.

IV. Conclusion

Papercrete is an innovative material that offers a sustainable alternative to conventional building materials. While its low strength and high-water absorption present challenges, its environmental benefits and affordability make it a viable solution for specific applications. Future research and development efforts could optimize its properties, paving the way for widespread adoption in sustainable construction.

References

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