

# Open defecation fields in emergencies

## Clearing of scattered excreta

In an emergency, where indiscriminate open defecation is practiced, the first step in excreta disposal is to provide designated defecation sites and clear existing scattered faeces. This is an unpleasant task and in some cultures it may be especially difficult to find willing and suitable personnel, but it is essential to minimise the spread of faecal-oral disease.

Faeces can be covered with lime and should be removed to a safe disposal site such as a pit. Workers must be provided with appropriate tools and protective clothing.

## Controlled open field defecation

In the initial stages of an emergency, areas where people can defecate, rather than where they cannot, should be provided immediately. These should be located where excreta cannot contaminate the food chain or water sources.

Open areas or fields surrounded by screening may be set up, with segregated sites for each men and women.

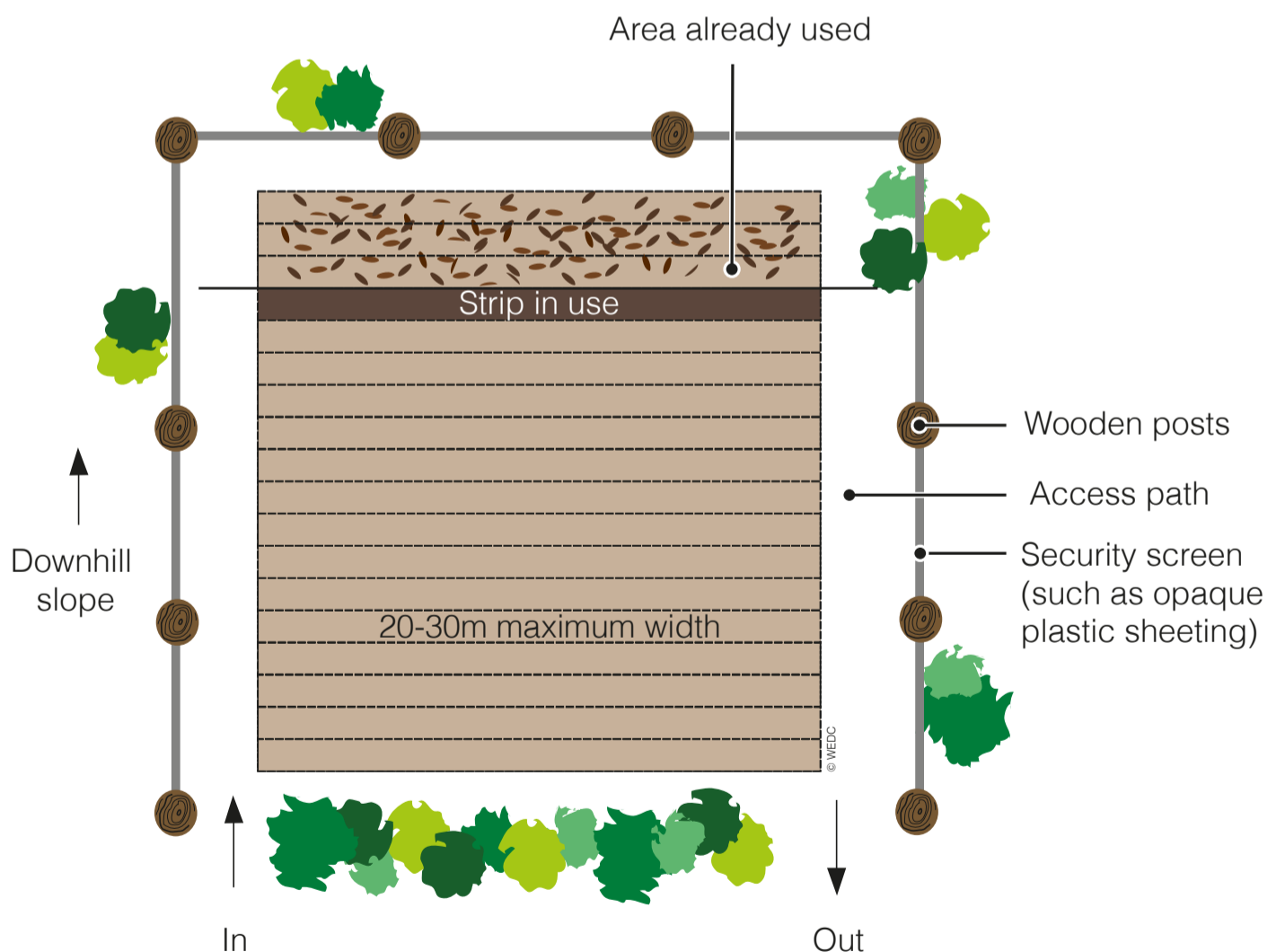
People should be encouraged to use one strip of land at a time and used areas must be clearly marked. It is also possible to use internal partitions to provide more privacy and encourage greater use.

It is essential that defecation areas are:

- far from water storage and treatment facilities;
- at least 50m from water sources;
- downhill of settlements and water sources;
- far from public buildings or roads;
- not in field crops grown for human consumption; and
- far from food storage or preparation areas.

**Advantages:** It is rapid to implement; minimal resources are required; and it minimises indiscriminate open defecation.

**Constraints:** There is a lack of privacy for users; considerable space is required; it is difficult to manage; there is potential for cross-contamination of users; and it is better suited to hot dry climates.



Source: HARVEY, P. A., BAGHRI S. and REED, R. A. 2002. *Emergency Sanitation: Assessment and Programme Design*. Loughborough, UK: WEDC, Loughborough University