

How can we better protect our streams and rivers?

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The Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong would like to express its serious concern over the building of the 25-metre "illegal dam-like access road" across the natural stream of the Upper Tai Po River ("Eco-vandals block village stream", January 14). The road was part of a development plan involving small houses.

Once again, this exemplifies our general neglect of geoconservation. Neither our government nor our society really cares about conserving our geo-resources until the damage has already been done.

The illegal damage to the Tai Po River is a repeat of what was done at the Tung Chung River and Sha Kok Mei stream in 2003. The excavation of hundreds of tonnes of boulders from a 300-metre stretch of the Tung Chung River in Lantau, and the laying of concrete along Sha Kok Mei stream, Sai Kung, for a village house development resulted in significant ecological damage. Have we really learned any lessons?

In addition to the rivers and streams, how many other illegal acts, including construction work, dumping of waste and destruction of our natural resources, have taken place in Hong Kong ?

Recently, our association complained about the illegal dumping of giant concrete blocks near the coastal waters of Ma Shi Chau and Tai Mei Tuk Outdoor Water Sports Centre. Some project above the water while others are submerged in it. This indiscriminate and illegal dumping has already destroyed the invaluable geological and topographic features of Ma Shi Chau.

We raised the issue with various government departments, but unfortunately, none of them claimed responsibility.

The courts must deal with eco-vandalism. The current legislation is too lenient on these people. The maximum fine for an unauthorised extraction is HK\$5,000 and up to six months in jail, while the destruction of rocks carries penalties of only a HK\$500 fine and three months' jail.

The whole of society suffers as a result of eco-vandalism. What is the cost to our precious natural resources which, once damaged, might never recover? How much taxpayers' money has the government had to spend on reinstatement work?

We urge the government to review the current legislation and toughen the penalties. Departments concerned must step up law enforcement action and enhance their environmental awareness and co-ordination. Public education and publicity must be enhanced.

Inviting the general public to report these illegal acts must also be promoted.

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