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Azmi: Our hands are tied over high-risk projects

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KUALA LUMPUR: The blame game begins.

The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry says the law has been lax in allowing projects to be developed in high-risk areas.

Minister Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said the ministry's hands were tied as it could not do anything until environmental impact assessments (EIAs) were made compulsory for all development projects.

He said the law did not require developers to submit EIA reports on projects below 50ha, which had resulted in housing and commercial projects in high-risk areas.

"They make full use of the law. They were not required to submit EIA reports and that is why a lot of projects are in high-risk areas."

Azmi was commenting on a *New Straits Times* report yesterday which stated that thousands were living dangerously as several areas nationwide were developed in high-risk areas.

The report, quoting a soil expert, also stated that more landslides and sinkholes were expected.

It urged the Government to install an early warning system to alert the authorities to potential catastrophes.

The system, the expert had said, would allow experts to analyse soil movement and give them time to repair or minimise damage.

Azmi said his ministry would go all out to amend the Environmental Quality Act 1974 immediately to ensure that all development projects, including those below 50ha, undergo stringent EIA checks.

Public Works Department Slope Engineering division director Datuk Dr Ashaari Mohamad said the division was looking at various early warning systems.

"But it will not be done immediately as we are in the process of collecting data on safe and high-risk areas from various local councils."

Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo said he did not know how long it would take to implement the system.

Ampang Jaya Municipal Council president Datuk Ahmad Shafii Saidin could not be contacted to comment on soil experts' estimate that 80 per cent of Hulu Klang was at risk of landslides.



Institut Kerja Raya Malaysia (Ikram) personnel conducting soil evaluation work at a house in Taman Zooview, Hulu Klang, yesterday. — NST picture by Abd Rahim Rahmat