

# Steps taken to ensure safety at forest reserves

STEPS have been taken to address safety concerns at permanent forest reserves where 76 fatalities were recorded since 2010.

They included identifying risk areas, placing adequate warning signs, setting up of rescue teams, tree management and early warning sirens for headwater incidents, said Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar.

He said the fatal accidents happened to hikers and those picnicking at one of the 112 forest reserves and seven national parks throughout the country.

"There were 118 accidents which resulted in 76 fatalities at the permanent forest reserves (since 2010)," he said in a written reply to Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim (Independent-Bandar Tun Razak).

Among the accidents, there were 55 drownings, 30 cases of hikers going missing, 21 cases of hikers falling, eight cases of being swept away by headwaters and four cases of being hit by falling trees or branches.

Meanwhile, Dr Wan Junaidi said it was the responsibility of the Penang state government to address environmental issues related to the proposed undersea tunnel and hillslope development.

The Federal Government only guides the states on the regulations, he added.

"It's the state governments that are responsible for implementing the laws in their respective states," he said when answering a question by Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Bagan).

He cited tree felling in Penang Hill as an example that drew public ire.

"People can see it and ask if it is a federal or state issue.

"It is the responsibility of the state through the local authorities to enforce the law," he added.

When replying to Datuk Raime Unggi (BN-Tenom), Dr Wan Junaidi said penalties imposed on offenders flouting environmental laws had been enhanced, with those convicted facing fines of between RM100,000 and RM1mil including five years' jail.