

Green law 'must be enforced'

An independent team should be set up to ensure the law on environmental impact assessments is properly enforced, a senior legislator said yesterday.

Speaking at a legislative session in Beijing, Chen Zhili, vice-chairwoman of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People's Congress, said lawmakers spent June and July field-testing the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment and found several problems with it.

The law, introduced in December 2002 to assess the potential environmental threat of all new construction projects, has been subject to "frequent violations", she said.

"The problem is that some of the intermediary agencies that conduct environmental impact assessments are allied in some way to environment bureaus this sort of nepotism is prohibited under the law," she said.

"If the system is not changed, the justice of the law itself cannot be guaranteed."

The answer is to establish an independent team to undertake the assessments, she said.

"In line with the reform of government agencies, it is suggested the link between the intermediary agencies and the environmental bureaus is cut, so that a truly independent team can be established according to the law."

Between 2003 and last year, environment officials across the country reviewed more than 1 million construction projects, Chen said.

Between 2006 and last year, almost 400 schemes were suspended for pollution violations, yet 10 percent still went ahead without authorization, she said.

Local governments regularly violate the policies issued by the environment ministry, she said.

Last year alone, the ministry discovered 51 local regulations that directly contradicted the law, Chen said.

Some local leaders still put GDP growth ahead of environmental protection, and they are getting away with it, she said.

Huang Xihua, vice-director of the Huizhou environmental protection bureau in Guangdong, agreed.

"The law is weakly implemented at lower levels because it all depends on the awareness of the local leaders," she told China Daily yesterday.

"If they receive no government funding, they have to resort to dirty industry: putting GDP growth ahead of the environment," she said.

Source: China Daily