

'REVIEW TREE-CARE POLICY'

Malaysia should learn from Singapore, HK in drafting regulations, say experts

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EXPERTS believe there is an urgent need to review the tree-care policy in Malaysia to prevent possible fatalities caused by uprooted trees.

They suggested that Malaysia take a leaf from Singapore and Hong Kong in drafting clear code regulations in tree management instead of mere guidelines.

Malaysian Society of Arborists president Mohd Zailani Jamil said the May 7 incident where a man died after a tree fell on his car in Jalan Sultan Ismail underscored the need to have proper regulations.

"While the authorities encourage us to plant more trees, not enough attention is given to tree care. We need to get it right the first time instead of referring to arborists only when it is too late."

Zailani said there was an acute shortage of arborists in Malaysia.

He said there are 150 International Society of Arboriculture-certified arborists in the country compared with 400 in Singapore.

He said policies must also be in place to ensure that only certified arborists are allowed to manage trees.

"An arborist should be able to care for an average of 70 to 80 healthy trees, while sick ones need extra attention. However, in



Kuala Lumpur City Hall workers removing an uprooted tree from Jalan Pinang on Monday. BERNAMA PIC

Kuala Lumpur alone, there are easily more than 100,000 trees, and we're only talking about the ones in public areas," he said.

Botany expert Dr Saw Leng Guan warned that incidents of uprooted trees would continue unless clear regulation codes are implemented.

He said the existing guidelines under the National Landscape Department were insufficient.

"We need clear code regulations so that those responsible for tree management will have to adhere to what is set out.

"What is happening in many cases is the absence of arborists to advise on how to treat trees to

cater to urbanisation."

Saw noted that the way trees were managed now, particularly big trees, would lead to even more problems.

He said problems began when old trees, for example, were deprived of water and nutrients due to the building of pavements, walkways and sidewalks.

"Above ground, everything looks fine. But underground, we cannot see what is happening.

"We don't realise these old trees can't get enough water, nutrients and even oxygen.

"Over time, its primary and secondary roots may no longer be strong enough to support it and it

will eventually come crashing down. While we prioritise urbanisation, there must be balance."

On the tree that fell on Jalan Sultan Ismail on May 7, Saw said based on images, there was little green space around the tree for it to get enough water, nutrients and oxygen.

"It was surrounded by cemented pavement and roads.

"Over time, this particular tree began to wither, leading to the incident," he said.

Page 1 pic: Forestry Department staff pruning a tree at Taman Eko Rimba Telok Arong in Mersing, Johor, in 2021.