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Dept steps up enforcement against illegal logging

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MIRI: Sarawak Forest Department is intensifying its enforcement in view of rampant cases of illegal logging in the state.

This year alone up to May 11, a total of 6,273 logs illegally felled were seized, with estimated value of RMRM276,835.

The department's senior assistant director (Protection and Enforcement Division) Jack Liam said for the same period, 36 cases of illegal logging had been opened and referred to the relevant authorities for further action.

Among others seized were a vessel with crane, eight lorries and four tractors/excavators.

"In the same period, 51 people have been detained and questioned to assist investigations," he said at a press conference after the opening a Workshop on Development of Social Forestry in Sarawak here yesterday.

Director Sapuan Ahmad declared open the three-day workshop held at a local hotel here.

Jack, who is the workshop organising chairman, said due to the aggressive enforcement action against illegal logging by the department, the number of logs seized dropped drastically in 2014 and 2015.

It was reported early this year that about 90,873 cubic metres of logs were seized in 2014 while in 2015 about 47,060 cubic metres were seized.

Meanwhile, Sapuan who also spoke at the media conference said to enhance the war against illegal

logging, enforcement officers are equipped with 50-pump guns and 29 four-wheel-drive vehicles for patrolling.

"We even use the latest technology like Unmanned Aerial Vehicle or better known as drone to monitor certain areas.

"We hope that through this sophisticated technology who can't lie like humans, there will be less cases of illegal logging in the state. Before this some honorary forest rangers were involved in illegal logging," he pointed out.

He said apart from enforcement activities, information from members of the public is also vital to nab illegal loggers.

"We appeal to everyone to report illegal logging activities in their areas," he added.

Some 60 representatives of government departments and agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil organisations and the private sector including academicians attended the workshop.

Also present was Dr Lim Fah Hui, Fellow of Social Forestry Programme (FRIM), who was the moderator of the workshop.

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Sapuan Ahmad, Sarawak Forest Department director