

Beijing to pass pioneering pollution law

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By Li Shuang

Beijing is likely to be the first on the mainland to pass a local law against water pollution that allows government institutions and organizations to assist victims in collecting evidence against polluters in civil lawsuits.

The act will help tear down the greatest barrier to individuals and environmental organizations trying to stop polluters by making evidence collection easier, an analyst said Monday.

The draft Beijing Water Pollution Prevention Act states that government offices and environmental protection institutions may assist water pollution victims in civil lawsuits in the process of determining the origin, scope and damage of water pollution cases.

"I think government offices 'should' assist water pollution victims rather than 'may' as it says in the draft," said Wei Aimin, a Haidian district people's representative, "but the new draft is a breakthrough for pollution lawsuits nonetheless."

The biggest hindrance in water pollution lawsuits in China is getting official evidence to present in court, according to Wei, as government offices are seldom willing to provide it.

"Local governments often protect the polluters to protect GDP," he said.

The draft passed its initial discussion phase at Beijing Municipal People's Congress earlier this week. The Standing Committee of Beijing Municipal People's Congress will vote on the draft at a meeting on November 17.

<http://china.globaltimes.cn/society/2010-09/577091.html>