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Civil Engineering and
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101 Princess Margaret Road,
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13 December 2010

By Fax Only
(2250 3242)

Editor of South China Morning Post

Dear Editor,

“Safety” Works Unnecessary

I refer to the article on the captioned subject from Mr. Peter Tanner published on 3 December 2010.

While appreciating Mr. Tanner’s passion for a natural environment and cost effectiveness of public works, the importance of public safety must not be taken lightly or overshadowed by concerns about visual impact and costs. The government has an imperative duty of care to the public at large and always takes a prudent approach in justifying the needs for any public works.

With the absence of specific details and locations on the comments made in the article, we would like to provide the following information as a general response to clarify some of the common misconceptions.

Blockage of the catchwater channels by landslide debris could lead to havoc on the downhill developments. A blockage occurs when debris from landslides falls onto and blocks the catchwater channel, forming a dam and causing water to back up behind the debris. This may lead to overtopping and spilling of water causing flooding and damage to areas downhill. Works are thus required to minimize the risk of failure of slopes adjacent to catchwaters.

It is our policy to make government slopes look as natural as possible to reduce their visual impact and improve the environment. Shotcrete cover is used on slopes only after other techniques have been explored and found not practical or inadequate on slope stability grounds.

The need for fencing and signage at public areas should take into account the needs of the community at large rather than just the able-bodied.

We would be pleased to follow up or redirect to the appropriate departments the issues raised in the article if Mr. Tanner could provide more details through email to chtsoi@cedd.gov.hk.

Yours faithfully,

(Robert Tsoi)

Senior Engineer / Media Communications
Civil Engineering and Development Department