

## 《最高人民法院拟启动环保法庭》

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The Supreme People's Court is considering setting up an environment and resources tribunal to hear complex environmental disputes and solve increasingly severe pollution problems, according to insiders.

Experts have confirmed the move to China Daily, but the court declined to comment on the issue on Friday. An official announcement is expected within days.

Wang Canfa, an environmental law professor at China University of Political Science and Law, said environmental dispute cases are unique.

It can be hard to identify those responsible, damage can have been caused over a long period and both the environment and local residents can be affected, Wang said.

Setting up a government body specializing in such cases can promote the role of the judges and ensure that cases are resolved fairly, he said.

Compared with environment and resources tribunals at local level, legal experts expect the top court's tribunal to involve different functions, such as providing guidelines to the local tribunals and hearing individual environmental cases.

Wang Mingyuan, an environmental law professor at Tsinghua University, said, "The most important tasks for this tribunal should be researching and drafting relevant legal explanations, releasing typical case studies and providing instructions to lower-level tribunals on complicated cases."

Xi Xiaoming, vice-president of the Supreme People's Court, said during a work conference with legal experts and officials in Beijing last month that the court intended to promote construction of professional juridical institutions in response to increasingly severe environmental disputes.

Many local governments, aiming to solve such problems, have set up environmental courts or tribunals, with the number reaching more than 130 nationwide since 2007.

Ma Yong, director of the supervision and litigation department at the Environmental Legal Service Center of the All-China Environment Federation, said, "Many of the courts and tribunals now have so few environmental cases to hear."

"They have even started to hear cases completely irrelevant to environmental protection, such as divorce cases and hit-and-run cases."

Experts said they expect the Supreme People's Court tribunal to focus on this problem initially. once the tribunal is set up, more environmental tribunals could be introduced at local level.

"The knock-on effect of the top court's move could be huge," said Wang from the China University of Political Science and Law.

But he said it is not necessary for courts at all levels to launch environmental tribunals. It would be better to choose a group of intermediate people's courts to set up them up, with cases covered on a regional basis.

