

RISKING LIFE FOR POWER

State Energy Commission director says squatters use dangerous, crude methods

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HAVING worked with the Energy Commission in Sabah for four years, Nazlin Ab Salim Sidiki has seen her share of dangerous things people do to get free electricity.

The commission's Sabah West Coast director claimed, among others, she has seen a child as young as 10 illegally placing hooks to tap into a live electricity power cable at a squatter colony.

The long-standing power theft problem in Sabah has caused losses to utility company Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd (SESB), and frequent disruptions.

Their actions had also caused deaths of others.

"The child's action, like many others who live in squatter areas, was not safe and could be life-threatening," she told the *New Straits Times* recently.

Besides putting metal hooks on the power line, another method commonly discovered is tapping directly to sub-stations.

"Electricity has become a basic necessity for people and this is why many, who are not

entitled to power supply, risk their lives to steal it," Nazlin said.

She said most people who tapped into the power supply using such methods were squatters.

The commission believe there are about 178,000 squatter homes in Sabah, and most are occupied by immigrants.

In 2015, SESB estimated its losses at RM64 million, and this include theft involving commercial and industrial consumers.

"Cases involving consumers can be detected more easily and followed up with the necessary action because the locations are linked to our system as registered systems, but not those at squatter areas," Nazlin added.

The commission also has no power to arrest those involved in the illegal activity.

Nazlin said the Energy Commission and SESB had been threatened many times during their enforcement operations.

"There were times when these people would arm themselves with swords while lying in wait for our enforcement personnel.

"This was why in most operations we needed help from security agencies because it could be dangerous for them," she said.

Between 2014 and last year, 223 integrated operations were conducted across the state.

Legal prosecution, too, had not been easy as many of those caught tapping power illegally would flee the country when it was time to face the law, or they might have been deported before they could face the justice system.



Nazlin Ab Salim Sidiki



Enforcement officers cutting an electric cable while guarded by an Eastern Sabah Security Command enforcer during an integrated operation in Sandakan recently. (Inset) A Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd employee confiscating cables which were used by squatters to steal electricity in Sandakan. FILE PIX