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Recent extreme rainfall-induced landslides and government countermeasures in Korea

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During 2011 a large number of landslides occurred in South Korea as a result of heavy rainfall (160∼300mm/day) which fell between 19 June and 27 July. Fifty eight people were killed and 200 injured at 11 locations. Almost 80% of the fatal landslides can be attributed at least in part to human activities such as an army camp, pedestrian road, forest road, cemetery, tomb, irrigation for vegetable garden and fruit farm. This paper addresses the anthropogenic influences on recent landslides in Korea.

In addition, this paper discusses the Korean government countermeasures related to landslides. Restoration works tends to start immediately without design reports and without investigating the causes of landslides. Restoration works tend to comprise simple erosion control such as hard-covering to failure surfaces and the provision of check dams. These measures are implemented without any input from specialist geotechnical engineers.

Persons injured or subject to economic loss as a result of landslides have often taken legal action against the Korean government. The most usual result is that experts appointed by the courts side with Government and simply conclude that the disasters are the natural consequence of heavy rainfall. As a result claimants have generally lost their cases and received no compensation. Furthermore, because of the lack of proper investigations there are no lessons learned from past landslides and no department has been established within the Korean government, tasked with reducing landslide risk.