

~~\$10m owed for repairs~~

In these cases, responsibility could lie with hundreds of people in a block of flats.

The expected cost recovery from owners' corporations was close to 100 per cent but only about 90 per cent for multi-ownership cases.

Incoming flat owners in the latter group would not recognise bills owed by previous owners, said Mr Tsang.

He added: "Owners in some areas are not so well off and have trouble paying".

The cost of a small slope stabilisation project, including consultancy fees, ranges from \$350,000 to \$2.5 million.

In cases of single ownership, the high cost is sometimes prohibitive. In one case in the New Territories, the department had to write off \$1.5 million, Mr Tsang said.

Sixteen statutory notices have been issued since

January and five have so far responded. Mr Tsang said most of the others are at an inquiry or negotiation stage.

"I don't know how many can be considered non-compliant — I guess one or two," he said. The owners have six months to respond to an order.

Other sources reveal apathy among private developers to maintain their slopes.

Dr Ian McFeat Smith, a geotechnical engineer with private consultancy firm Atkins Haswell, said: "We've sent a circular to lots of developers pointing out that the government has made private owners responsible for their slopes and of the 100-odd sent, only three responded."

R K S Chan, the GEO's chief geotechnical engineer said: "The government has long been concerned about the poor maintenance of slopes."