

28 Aug. 1988

20,000 small factories may have to shut

By Brian Power

THE Government is considering a radical plan to remove up to 20,000 small factories from older buildings that were never designed for industrial use.

The Building and Lands Department is looking at whether the Government should begin to enforce the original land grants for hundreds of buildings built before 1976 — effectively forcing factories out and displacing at least 100,000 workers.

The move would have a major effect on land use in areas such as Tsim Sha Tsui, Yau Ma Tei and Mong Kok, where thousands of factories exist in older buildings originally intended for housing.

"It's time we looked at just how much longer housing for a lot of people will be messed up by industries next door," Government Land Agent Mr Roger Nissim said.

Mr Nissim has instructed staff to begin a survey of just how many factories exist in older non-industrial buildings.

He estimated the number was "not

much changed" from the 20,000 estimated in the mid-1970s.

The survey will also determine how much factory space is available in new flatted factories built in recent years, especially in the New Territories.

After the survey, which could take up to four months, the department will consult with district boards.

Mr Nissim admitted the proposal could meet with stiff resistance, especially from factory owners who don't want to give up their central locations.

The Government proposal, however, was well-received by district board members in old central districts where problems in multi-storey buildings were the most serious.

Mr Chung Yee-on, who has been serving the Wan Chai District Board for more than six years, said he had received many complaints about noise caused by small factories set up in residential blocks.

The Government should enact suitable legislation to forbid any industrial and commercial undertakings to be established in residential buildings.

Mong Kok District Board member, Mr Chan Kwok-ming, who is also an Urban Councillor, said the proposed compulsory removal should be implemented in stages to ensure the least possible disruption.

Small industrialists should be resettled first before closing down their premises.

Yau Tsim District Board member Mr Lai Wing-tak had reservations about the proposal, which he thought would be hard to implement.

Mr Lai, who is Yau Tsim District Board environmental committee chairman, said the Government should help residents become better organised to manage the buildings to avoid similar mishaps like the one in Mirador Mansion.

One example is Mirador Mansion in Nathan Road, the scene of a tragic fire early this month in which two people died.

Mr Nissim described the building as a "Warren," which contained 305 small, cramped factories in its 17 floors.