

# 20,000 small factories in homes may face the axe

ABOUT 20,000 small factories operating in residential buildings will have to move out in the next few years if a set of policy proposals now being prepared is accepted by the Executive Council.

The proposals, to be submitted next month, will state the Government's long-term policy against these factories and immediate action to be taken.

According to Principal Assistant Secretary for Environment Tony Eason, a full-scale attack against the factories will be deployed over the next few years in a phased programme.

Pioneering this all-out attack will be three immediate actions, which hopefully will be carried out within this year.

The first target will be those dangerous and obnoxious factories which produce large amounts of smell, heat, noise and smoke in their production processes. They will be driven out of existing domestic premises.

The Government will

also take action to stop residential buildings to be completed in the future from being invaded by industrial undertakings.

The existing Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance will also be amended to empower the Commissioner of Labour to refuse provisional registration of factories operating in residential buildings.

Although Mr Eason could not specify a date for the execution of these actions, he promised that "pressure on illegal factories will be felt before the end of the year."

The operation of small factories in residential buildings has long been impairing the local living environment. Since 1971, there has been a growing concern among the public on the undesirability of these factories. But the Government has so far been withholding from full-scale enforcement of law against them because of inadequate inspection staff and the possible impact of such action on the local economy - particularly under the current unemployment atmosphere.

There are 20,000

factories operating in domestic premises, employing about 100,000 workers.

"Before we get tough with these factories, we have to consider ways of offering accommodation alternatives to allow the people to carry on their business," said Mr Eason.

He stressed that Government accommodation for all of these factories would be unlikely because of the heavy spending needed.

Instead, the Government would encourage private developers to fill in the gap, he added. But so far, work along this line is not well developed.

Mr Eason noted that the Government can keep factories out of residential premises through the co-ordinated efforts of a number of law enforcement authorities such as the Registrar General's Department's Lease Enforcement Unit, the PWD Building Ordinance Office, the Labour Department, the Urban Services Department, the Fire Services Department and the New Territories Administration.