

Abattoirs forced to shut down

'We fight on' say health inspectors

By TIMOTHY JIM

Meat merchants lost business valued at over \$1 million yesterday when the abattoir shutdown brought the supply of fresh meat to a halt.

Supplies will remain very limited this morning before the Government abattoirs re-open later today.

More than 60 per cent of meat shops were forced to suspend business shortly after 10 am yesterday when stocks of pork and beef ran out.

Almost all of the shops on both sides of the harbour closed in the afternoon.

Despite news of abattoir closures, there were no reports of panic buying.

Housewives remained as demanding as before on the freshness of the meat.

Prices remained stable although profit-taking merchants boosted prices by 80 to 90 cents per catty for pork.

Government abattoirs were forced to close for the first time by health inspectors who are staging a sit-in.

The civil servants have decided not to escalate their industrial action — unless authorities block all negotiation.

The health inspectors are pressing for better salary

treatment and working conditions.

The vice-chairman of the Health Inspectors Association, Mr Lam Tat-sang, said the inspectors are still keeping the door to negotiations open.

He added that they had not been invited to talks by their senior officials to disentangle the pay dispute.

The inspectors also threatened to continue their action indefinitely until a satisfactory reply is received.

Mr Lam said they had given in to their management twice in their earlier work-to-rules. This time they have decided to stand firm on their demand at all cost.

Meat merchants said yesterday they would not take any action to "regulate" the meat supply.

Chairman for the Pork Traders General Union, Mr Lai Sing, said merchants would observe what happens in the next few days. If the situation went on unchanged, they would be forced to take action to keep their businesses going.

Mr Lai said closing abattoirs on Sunday was a serious blow to the merchants as business on this day is normally higher than during the week.

He said the merchants had no plans to recover yesterday's losses.

The Urban Services Department announced the Sunday closure of abattoirs to relieve senior officers drafted to emergency duties.

No time limit has been set on the weekly closure.

Meanwhile, in a statement issued yesterday, the Hong-kong Medical and Health Department Pharmaceutical Staff Association voiced support for the health inspectors.

"The Urban Services Department makes use of public pressure in an attempt to shift the responsibility to the health inspectors.

"Such a tactic was also applied to us," it said.

The association is watching the situation closely.

"If necessary, we will appeal to our members and liaise with other civil service unions to support their industrial action," the statement added.