

Applicants get the service, inspectors get the sweat

By **BONNIE CHIU**

MOVES to streamline licensing procedures for restaurants have increased the workload on government departments responsible for inspections.

"Applicants will greatly benefit from the new system, but unfortunately it has increased our workload, causing many more problems," said Ng Chuck-lam, a surveyor with the Buildings Department.

Under the old licensing process, which took seven to eight months, applicants needed to obtain approval from three different departments - Urban or Regional Services, Fire Services and

Buildings - after separate inspections.

Much time was therefore wasted in inter-departmental communication.

Under the new system, which came into effect this month, the inspection will be made at the same time by all three departments and the vetting of applications will be done by a central panel.

Applicants can get direct advice on the legal requirements so they can make correct applications. The time it takes to process an application may be cut by four to six weeks.

However, Mr Ng added: "We used to group the appli-

cations of a few restaurants in the same area and then inspect them all at once.

"Under the new system, we have to inspect one restaurant in this district today and another in a different district tomorrow, which will increase our workload."

The Fire Services Department is also affected. "It is very difficult for the three departments to find a time for the joint inspection. This certainly affects our daily work," said Wong Yiu-wing, a senior station officer.

The three departments yesterday held a joint premises inspection at a Korean restaurant in Kwai Chung.