

S. C. W.P.

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1990 target set to shift 50,000 hillside squatters

By STANLEY LEUNG

The Government plans to rehouse about 50,000 squatters living on dangerous slopes within the next five years.

Although the Government hopes to have almost solved the squatter problem by 1990, it could give no guarantee for people's safety before the five-year completion date.

Officials from the Geotechnical Control Office and the Housing Department outlined their efforts and plans at a press conference yesterday.

They described how they intend to tackle the problem of dangerous slopes which have claimed about 350 lives in the past 30 years.

The Principal Government Geotechnical Engineer, Mr Edward Brand, said his office had submitted a preliminary report on the unstable slopes to the Housing Department for study.

Rehousing of squatters would be based on that report.

The dangerous sites were mainly in Eastern Kowloon and include Kun Tong and Sau Mau Ping. There are other sites on the eastern part of Hongkong Island although officials declined to give their exact locations.

Mr Brand said it would be unwise to publicise the locations because it would only cause unnecessary alarm to squatters living there.

"It could also mislead some people to

believe wrongly that they are in immediate danger and it might also lead to malpractices in the anticipation of clearance actions," he said.

It was likely, however, that landslides would occur in these slopes if there were heavy downpours.

Mr Brand said it was impossible to carry out preventive work on the slopes without moving the squatters themselves. If they were cleared, there was generally no need to carry out preventive work.

Mr Tony Bennett, the Assistant Director of Housing (Clearance), said about 1,000 units in permanent public houses and 3.6 hectares of land for building temporary housing a year would be allocated under the Non-Development Clear-

ance Programme.

"We can't move them overnight. If we achieve it say in one year, it means many other social programmes have to be stopped," he said.

Mr Bennett said about 7,000 people would be rehoused in the first year of the five-year plan and the others later.

The eligibility of a squatter for a permanent public house depended on his qualification, he added.

Because of the likelihood of landslides in squatter areas during rainstorms, the Government has devised the Landslip Warning System which is based on a sophisticated network of automatic rain gauges installed with the help of the Royal Observatory.

The system is intended to give squatters enough warning about a probable landslide occurring on steep hillsides. People would be warned by radio announcements.

The Royal Observatory forecast that 1985 will be an average year for rainfall. About 2,400 mm (95 inches) of rain is expected to fall between May and September.

Mr Brand said the death toll of fewer than 15 people a year is considered to be relatively small when compared to the 400 people killed annually in road accidents, he said.

Since 1976, more than \$550 million has been spent on stabilising more than 350 slopes and retaining walls.