(Oct. 1990

$10m bill to strip asbestos at plant

By CAITLIN WONG

THE company that bought Hongkong's desalter plant near Castle Peak will have to spend up to $10 million on demolishing the plant's extensive asbestos interiors.

However, the Government has not yet approved the work, even though a consultants' proposal on the demolition was submitted early last month, according to the director of the Cheong Wah Metal Company, Mr Lui Wing.

Mr Lui said that if the go-ahead was not forthcoming, the company might have to commission overtime work to beat the deadline of August 31 next year when it would have to finish removing plant items.

Cheong Wah bought the plant in Lok On Pai for $37 million and is responsible for all works associated with its dismantling.

Mr Lui said they had commissioned one of the Government-specified consultancy firms to carry out the demolition and had met Environmental Protection Department (EPD) officials several times to discuss the issue.

But no definite date had been set for the work to commence, he said over the weekend.

An EPD spokesman, however, said the department was not solely responsible for approving the proposal. The Water Supplies Department and the Labour Department were also involved, he said.

Mr Lui noted that most of the plant's machines were encased in asbestos.

Although he was not sure about the machines' condition, he said many could be rusty and not attractive to buyers.

Built in 1972 at a cost of $476 million, the desalter plant consists of six flash distillation units, each with its own oil-fired boiler, evaporator, turbo-generator and ancillaries.

Mr Lui said he would try to sell machines in good functioning condition intact because they would fetch higher prices but was prepared to sell most of them as scrap metal.

He said the cost for the asbestos-removal work was estimated to range between $8 million and $10 million, and this included the decontamination of all machines to thoroughly get rid of any asbestos dust, which is carcinogenic.