

\$1.6b bill for harbour clean-up

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TAXPAYERS will have to foot a \$1.6 billion bill to remove 27 million cubic metres of contaminated mud from the Victoria Harbour seabed.

Contaminated mud has been identified at typhoon shelters along the harbour shoreline where the \$9 billion West Kowloon Reclamation and \$1.8 billion Central and Wan Chai reclamation will take place.

Government officials said the mud would have to be dredged away or the reclaimed land would be unacceptable.

The mud will be dredged and put into holes in the seabed.

These holes will then be sealed with clean sand to prevent toxic materials such as copper, lead, chromium, and zinc, from being released into the ecosystem.

The cost of the operation was revealed by the Environmental Protection Department.

Principal environmental protection officer Paul Holmes said that between 1991 and 2001 an estimated of 26 million cubic metres of heavily contaminated sediment would have to be dredged from the seabed prior to reclamation.

The proposed disposal

method was the cheapest of options, he said.

"Other options like draining the contaminated mud and then dumping it in a landfill site could cost 10 times more than the method we have chosen," he said.

"Of course \$1.6 billion is a lot of money but I think it is the cost we have to pay for a problem left behind by industrialists for decades.

"The operation is costly mainly because we have to handle the mud carefully so the contamination will not disperse during dredging and transportation."

The situation in Victoria Harbour would continue to worsen until the \$15 billion strategic sewage disposal plan became operational at the end of this decade.

"Although the strategic disposal network is facing financing difficulty, we still expect to complete the whole system around 1997 or 1998," Mr Holmes said.

The strategic sewage disposal network is expected to halt the current pollution problem in the harbour. More than one million tonnes of raw wastewater, enough to fill 500 Olympic-size swimming pools, enters the harbour directly everyday.

Under plan, sewage in the urban area will be collected and treated before being discharged near Dangan Island in the South China Sea.