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# \$100,000 fine on firm for pollution

By KATHY GRIFFIN

A FACTORY manufacturing printed circuit boards has been fined \$100,000 for polluting the water at Tolo Harbour — one of the highest penalties ever for a single pollution offence.

Ultrafine Circuits Limited was caught discharging copper-contaminated waste water down the drain in its fifth offence, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) said.

The EPD announced details of the case, which was heard in Sha Tin Court last month, in its monthly list of prosecutions released yesterday.

The record for a single offence was the \$140,000 handed down on Shaw Brothers film company in November last year after it discharged cyanide into Clearwater Bay. This was later reduced to \$70,000 on appeal.

Other firms have been fined a total of \$100,000 or more but always for several offences.

Principal environmental protection officer Dr Mike Chiu Tak-lun said Ultrafine discharged waste water containing eight times the permitted level of copper, which is 2½ milligrams per kilogram of water.

Copper is a heavy metal which can enter the food chain and cause health problems in humans. Its presence also makes it more difficult to treat sewage and to dispose safely of the leftover sludge.

Dr Chiu said Ultrafine had anti-pollution equipment after its third offence but failed to operate or maintain it consistently, so contaminated water continued to be flushed down the drain.

But an Ultrafine spokesman said they ordered a treatment plant as required by the EPD in 1990, but by

the time it was installed and operating in February last year the EPD had tightened its standards.

He said the fine was too large considering the company was trying to meet the new standards by investing in additional equipment to be installed next month. He said they did not know yet if they would appeal.

The spokesman added that factories around Tolo Harbour were discriminated against because water pollution controls did not apply to their counterparts in Kwun Tong, Tsuen Wan or other areas around Victoria Harbour. Lack of funds has held up plans to declare controls in the harbour until at least 1995.

But Dr Chiu said most factories around Tolo Harbour were co-operating in a 1989 action plan on copper effluents and overall copper content in the harbour's sewage had been reduced by more than 400 per cent.

“Convictions always make people think seriously and I think a high fine produces a good deterring effect,” he said, adding the effect was not all negative because some factories had been motivated to invest in recycling systems.

The EPD's list of 47 offenders also included a company fined for the 10th and 11th times last month for air pollution.

The Guangdong Water Conservancy and Hydro-Power Engineering Development Company Limited was fined \$10,000 each time, less than the \$20,000 fine it paid for its ninth offence in March. The company operates a quarry in the middle of a residential area.

Mr Franklin Chung Moon-kun of the EPD said the offences this time were mostly due to procedure, such as not shutting a door through which dust escaped and not as severe as previous offences.