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Barge men to propose new fees

BARGE operators will meet officials of the Marine Department today in an attempt to block increased berthing fees at government piers.

They will propose a new system of charges to the department, but details are being kept secret before the talks.

A representative of the owners, Leung Fu, said they would also ask what action, if any, would be taken against those who refused to pay the new fees.

The operators were warned yesterday that they could be sued if they continued to pay the old charges.

Mr Leung said they had not received any summonses so far, but the owners and operators have already set up a special fund to cover legal expenses in case the government takes action against them.

A Marine Department spokesman said it had not been decided what action would be taken against operators who refused to pay the new charges. But, he added that many operators were complying with the new legislation.

OLD RATES

Mr Leung claimed that most of the owners and operators continued to pay the old rates yesterday though this was rejected by the Marine Department.

The increases were imposed on Monday despite strong protests that they were unreasonable and being too high.

Mr Leung said only those operators using the berths for a short period agreed to pay the new fees. This group was not that seriously affected because the increase was only between \$10 and \$15.

The Cargo Handlers' Union represents more than 600 barge operators and over 1,000 barges and lighters.

Meanwhile, about 100 truck drivers at the Yaumati barge depot yesterday refused to pay the new charges, which cost them \$20 each time they enter it.

They had been paying \$12 daily for an unlimited number of admissions to the depot. The drivers said they could not afford paying the new fees under the present circumstances.