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## Bargemen end fee boycott

BARGE operators have agreed to pay the new berthing fees at government piers following another round of talks with the Marine Department.

In return, the department has agreed to suspend the surcharges for six days starting today, pending further negotiations.

B a r g e m e n ' s representatives were told at yesterday's talks that no action would be taken against those not paying the surcharges during this period.

But those who still refuse to pay the new berthing fees after the grace period will be dealt with accordingly.

The department has already issued warning letters to operators not paying the new charges, but none has been summonsed so far.

A representative, Chan Wai, said they could accept the new fees but not the surcharges.

Under the new legislation, crane barges or other craft berthed alongside the seawall are required to pay a surcharge after a 48-hour working period.

This payment will have to be made regardless of the weather condition.

Cargo handlers are demanding that the 48-hour period be split into six working days and that the charge should be halved.

A barge of eight meters will be charged \$100 per day after the charge free period and vessels of the same size will be charged

\$200 after another two days and thereafter.

The Marine Department said the surcharge was considered to be most effective in preventing operators from monopolising valuable waterfront space for long periods.

It said complaints had been received regarding severe congestion in the waterfront areas. Lighters in particular had been seen idle for long periods, thereby denying access to those intending to load or discharge cargoes.

Importers and exporters have also complained of long delays in receiving and shipping their products.

The department also said the new fee structure was to cope with inflation as it was the first revision since 1974.