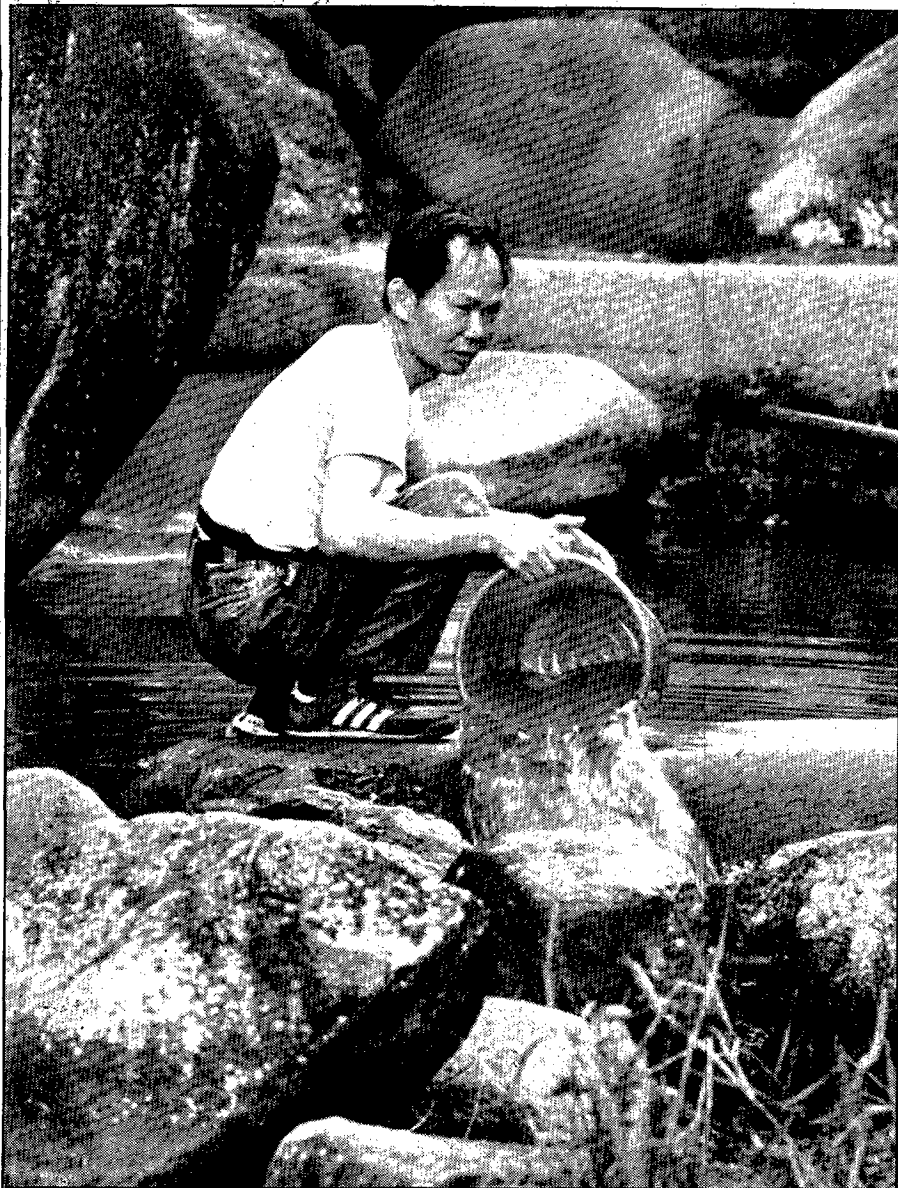


Anti-mosquito spray irritates villagers



A plastic rubbish tin is used to scoop the surface spray from the Sha Tin waterway.



A villager washing choi sum in delivered water.



Dead fish are pulled from the stream.

By JACQUELINE LEE

THE Regional Services Department (RSD) yesterday assured anxious villagers that an anti-mosquito agent sprayed by mistake on a Sha Tin stream was not toxic.

The department's staff yesterday tried to cleanse the watercourse by sweeping the oil-like contaminant downstream with buckets and brooms.

Buckets of drinking water were also delivered to households of the six villages in the Siu Lek Yuen Yeuk area which rely on the Fa Sum Hang stream for their water supply.

The villagers were angry when the stream was sprayed with the anti-mosquito agent on Saturday and were afraid that consumption of the stream water would be unsafe, having seen fish dying after the spraying.

An RSD health inspector, Mr Li

Ka-kei, said the agent sprayed was a non-toxic light oil which worked by forming a thin film on the water surface to suffocate mosquito larvae.

Mr Li said the stream water was safe for drinking although the agent could suffocate fish and plants, depending on the amount used.

He said cleansing workers had been called in to sweep the water surface to speed up the oil flow along the stream, which ran within the catchment areas of the Shing Mun River and the High Island Reservoir.

Mr Li dismissed concern about possible contamination of the reservoir, saying the oil would evaporate in one to two days.

RSD senior health inspector Chung Shiu-sun said it was the department's routine exercise to spray the anti-malaria oil on waters

where breeding of mosquitoes was possible.

He said the spraying on Saturday was the first on the Fa Sum Hang stream and the workers were unaware that villagers in the area obtained water from the stream for drinking, irrigation and fish-farming.

He maintained that the anti-malaria oil would be sprayed on watercourses supplying household needs should the situation require it.

But he said the department would review the incident before deciding on future anti-mosquito moves on the Fa Sum Hang stream.

Village representative Hui Kap-hing said residents were not convinced that the stream water would pose no threat to health and were furious about what they saw as a mistake by RSD staff.

"Why do they bother to deliver lorry-loads of water up here if they're sure the water is safe for drinking?" Mr Hui said.

"Villagers have in fact applied to install pipes to obtain water from the stream for drinking, irrigation and fish farming.

"There is even a warning sign at the stream to remind visitors not to contaminate the water.

"I can't see how the RSD staff could make such a big mistake by spraying the oil which contaminated our source of drinking water," he said.

Mr Hui said villagers would consider claiming compensation for losses of fish and vegetable produce.

He said more than half the 200 fish died in one of the two fish ponds affected by the contamination.