

Alcohol ban plan runs into trouble

By BELINDA WALLIS

PROPOSALS to ban the sale of alcohol to minors at all outlets were yesterday described as a potential nightmare for the Government by an official of the Urban Services Department responsible for enforcing liquor licensing policies.

Assistant director Mr Robert Murby said that to licence all premises selling alcohol would be a monumental task.

"The difficulties that would arise with enforcement would be an absolute nightmare," Mr Murby, who believed there would be great reluctance among government departments to take on the task, said.

"There are too many customers purchasing liquor in the tens of thousands of stores every day. To control this would be a horrendous task. I don't know how anyone would do it."

He said that having a law restricting the sale of alcohol may ease some people's conscience, but he did not see the proposal as tackling the problem.

"Sometimes an ineffectual law is worse than no law at all," he said.

It is not illegal for stores and supermarkets to sell alcohol to minors.

A number of legislative councillors have come out in support of a tougher stand against underage drinking, with some saying the law should be amended to cover the sale of alcohol to minors at all outlets.

A survey conducted for the *South China Morning Post* last weekend revealed



that about 80 per cent of those polled said the sale of alcohol to minors should be banned.

Top government officials from a number of branches will meet with the Commissioner for Youth, legislator Mr Eric Li Ka-cheung, on Monday to address the issue of underage drinking.

At the meeting department representatives are due to discuss the possibility of pushing for a ban on alcohol sales to those under 18.

Responding to Mr Murby's doubts over the effectiveness of such legislation, Mr Li said that if the problem warranted urgent action, even if the law was difficult to enforce, it would be worthwhile.

"I certainly don't share the view that a law to ban the sale of alcohol would end the problem," Mr Li said.

"What we must have is some sound data on the extent of the problem and feedback from the public.

"We have to try to understand the problem. It involves so many departments, but somebody has got to start it off rather than just talking about it and we intend to do that."

Attending Monday's meeting will be representatives from Health and Welfare, Security, Education and Manpower and the Recreation and Culture branches, and the City and New Territories Administration.