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Alarm at pollution health risk over reclamation

By KATHY GRIFFIN

SHAMSHUIPO District Board members reacted with alarm yesterday after learning that their area faces heavy pollution and public health risks from reclamation work in West Kowloon, but a government official said there was little that could be done to ease the situation.

An environmental impact assessment report released on Monday showed the waterfront from Mei Foo Sun Chuen to Jordan Road would be subject to appalling water and noise pollution for up to five years.

Mr Ambrose Cheung, who chairs the board's environment committee, said he would demand more information from the Government.

"I'm sure the Government is trying to do its best to mitigate the problems, but certainly it is an overall alarming situation that a number of nuisances will occur," he said.

He was especially concerned about noise pollution. The report said little could be done about the problem.

Mr James To, a board member and potential Legislative

Council candidate for Kowloon West, announced he was forming an ad hoc committee through the United Democrats of Hong Kong to look into the matter.

Speaking in a personal capacity, he said citizens in the area were until now unaware of the problem, and worried the impact might be greater than that outlined in the report.

He also worried about enforcement of any proposed mitigation measures such as not allowing noise at night. The report said there could be strong pres-

sure to relax these controls which should be resisted.

The report, by consultants Mott MacDonald (HK) and overseen by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), was released at an Environmental Pollution Advisory Committee meeting on Monday night.

It comes after the reclamation design and work were approved, but Principal Assistant Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, Dr Patrick Hase, yesterday defended the exercise.

"It has disclosed certain environmental problems that the

Government is now aware of," he said.

But he admitted: "We will do what we can to mitigate them but we can't do very much."

Water pollution will be the worst problem because it may put public health at risk through a fish and vegetable wholesale market at the Cheung Sha Wan waterfront.

Dr Hase said the deteriorating water quality might breed viruses such as hepatitis and cholera which could end up on the food.

"There is the possible risk

that as the water deteriorates, when the sun shone and the water evaporated, the water vapour would contain contaminants [which could land on the food].

"It is a very worst case scenario because the water would have to be very bad indeed to cause a health risk."

But that is possible because improvements to sewerage in the area, which would alleviate the pollution, are not yet fully funded.

The reclamation work was due to start a few weeks ago, but delayed due to the impasse on the new airport.

sewage discharged by many industries and residences between it and the mainland.

The Cheung Sha Wan market is proposed to be relocated on the reclaimed seawall area, which would be connected to the land by a causeway.

But the Agriculture and Fisheries Department, which administers the market, said a final decision had not been made and it would study the report.

An off-shore seawall will be built as the starting point of reclamation, trapping the untreated