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'Acidic water' damaging boats

A UK analysis of water samples taken from the Causeway Bay typhoon shelter has found acidity is dissolving protective paint on boats moored there.

The analysis was made by a paint company after the Royal Hongkong Yacht Club expressed concern at the increasing problem of damage to boats by water pollution in the shelter.

Director and General Manager of International Paint (Hong Kong) Ltd, Mr David James, said initial results showed the water contained hydrogen sulphide and was "mildly acidic".

The acidity of the water was causing the rapid breakdown of the paint, Mr James said.

He said the company would wait for the final results from the UK and double-check them against further water samples taken yesterday to be tested in Hongkong.

Mr James said the company had undertaken the analysis because of "chronic" problems in the last six months with the performance of copolymer or anti-fouling paints designed to prevent barnacles, shell and weed growth.

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>
> — Mr Brian Shell
> Yacht Club marine and boatyard manager

He said the paint was simply being "dissolved off".

"We don't have that problem in Hebe Haven, Aberdeen or any other yacht mooring areas in Hongkong", he said.

Mr James said the company would look at developing an alternative paint to withstand the conditions while still giving a reasonable performance.

"It won't be as good as we've got now but we have to compromise with the conditions", he said.

Yacht Club marine and boatyard manager, Mr Brian Shell, said the pollutants initially affected only the water-line area of the boat but were now "eating back" the whole underwater body of the hull.

"The problem is such that we need to get to the bottom of it and fairly quickly," he said.

Mr Shell said when firm results of the analysis were known they would be made available to the Environmental Protection Department and the club's officers would decide on further action.

Department Acting Assistant Director, Waste and Water, Mr John Boxall, said he would comment on the analysis results when he saw them.

Mr Boxall said the main cause of pollution in the shelter was foul sewage, including human effluent.

This became trapped there because of a lack of "flushing" of the shelter to get it out.

"The major sources are the expedient connections of foul sewage to the stormwater drain system...a lot of it is commercial premises connecting their foul sewage into the stormwater," he said.

Another source of sewage contamination was from the people who live in the typhoon shelter, Mr Boxall said.

"And there is an accumulation of deposits on the base of the typhoon shelter which affects the actual water quality itself."

Mr Boxall said the department had undertaken a small survey of the area that drains into the typhoon shelter and had identified a number of small schemes to divert the foul sewage that is in the stormwater drain system away from the shelter back to the foul sewerage system.

Mr Boxall said the department hoped to get the go-ahead to implement the schemes next year.

"The problem then is that even if we diverted all of the foul sewage from the typhoon shelter we obviously need to investigate the whole of the catchment area and devise plans for it and that's quite a long job.

"We have a lot of problems in Hongkong and we have got to sort them out in priority. Our job is to get these schemes into the public works programme."