

# 1997 factor hits green movement

By KATHY GRIFFIN

WORRIES over 1997 are holding the territory back from addressing long-term environmental issues that could determine whether Hongkong remained economically competitive, business and environment experts warned.

The alert comes as the the Conservancy Association and Environmental Campaign Committee announces today - which is Earth Day - plans to send a delegation to a United Nations' Earth Summit in June.

The Hongkong Government is not sending anyone to the summit which will look at sustainable development, a concept that promotes economic growth without depleting resources for future generations.

Other local groups are trying to address the issue, with the Hongkong General Chamber of Commerce circulating a charter on sustainable development and the Centre for Environmental Technology promoting greener business practices.

But Mr Guy Clayton, chairman of the chamber's environment committee, said there was resistance because people were not interested in looking beyond 1997.

Mr Gordon Ng Ting-

leung of the Conservancy Association also said 1997 was a hindrance, although not the only one.

"One of the things about sustainable development is whether you can see into the future. Hongkong has two problems: one is political and the other is the nature of industry here. There are lots and lots of small industry, and they are flexible and short-lived," he said.

Mr Clayton said some factories might have to go out of business if they did not clean up their acts because the community could not tolerate subsidising heavy polluters.

He added it was also a matter of survival that businesses go green because demand for products that did not pollute was growing in Hongkong's major markets, especially Europe and North America.

But Mr Stephen Lam Wing-hong, the director of the Centre for Environmental Technology, said Hongkong industry was "slumbering" when it came to environmental investment.

The situation was not helped by the lack of political will among elected legislators who were well-positioned to call attention to the problems, he said.

"I'm somewhat disappointed that the political leadership [in the Legis-

lative Council] has not come out in some substantial way to engage in some kind of positive dialogue ... and give us some direction, instead of just the Government doing that," he said.

But Mr Clayton said the Government also fell short on its commitment to the environment and the long delays in cleaning up Victoria Harbour and other areas sent the wrong message to industry.

The principles behind sustainable development are to search for renewable resources, produce only as much waste as the environment can absorb naturally, and use resources at a rate which enables them to regenerate, according to Mr Ng.

Mr Lam said factories did not necessarily need to make an expensive investment to achieve these goals, but could start with an environmental audit which catalogued the impact of operations from the source of materials to waste disposal.

The Business Charter for Sustainable Development, created by the International Chamber of Commerce and circulated by the Hongkong branch, is promoting these principles. More than 40 multi-nationals with offices in Hongkong and 32 locally-registered companies have signed.