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Sunday 6 December 2009 (19 Dhul Hijjah 1430)

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'Strengthen Musk Lake's walls to avoid catastrophe'

Arab News

JEDDAH: Environmental experts have warned that authorities must take precautionary measures in order to bolster the infrastructure that contains an enormous dumping ground of untreated sewage located just outside and above Jeddah to the east. The lake of filth, called Buhairat Al-Misk (Musk Lake), has grown over the years as sewage trucks used to empty building septic systems have dumped their loads there, forcing municipal officials over the years to add more dams and levees to contain the waste as it grows beyond its previous boundaries.

The dumping of untreated waste on porous desert soil was initially supposed to be a temporary measure, according to a report carried by Al-Madinah Arabic daily quoting former Jeddah Mayor Abdullah Al-Muallami. But temporary became indefinite and today the site continues to receive hundreds of truckloads of raw sewage daily.

The former mayor warns that the collapse of the site's main dam could cause a surge that would breach the other, smaller dams and flood much of the city within six hours with millions of cubic meters of sewage. The paper said Al-Muallami, who is an engineer, had warned about the possibility of a dam breach seven years ago, but many officials had ruled out such a possibility.

The fears raised by the former mayor surfaced again following the Nov. 25 flash flooding that raised fears that the dams would be breached.

However, Al-Muallami said the municipality should not be blamed for the situation. "The basic problem is the lack of a sewerage network," the paper quoted the official as saying. "The present (main) sewage dam is OK but I cannot guarantee that it would not collapse, although we support it with all means."

"The collapse of the dam would be a big tragedy because its wastewater could reach Prince Muhammad (Tahlia) Street within six to nine hours," the paper quoted Al-Muallami as saying.

A catastrophe like that would most severely affect the low-income neighborhoods located less than 2,000 meters from the part of Buhairat Al-Misk that is closest to the city. But engineers believe in the event of a dam failure, the sewage would end up affecting the entire city, even pouring rainwater mixed with sewage down the posh shopping strip of lower Tahlia Street.

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Prince Ahmed Bin Salman



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