

Government plans for checks costing over £1,000 a year are 'a slap in the face'

# Quarriers inspection blast site charges

BY PAUL THOMPSON

QUARRIERS will be forced to stump up yet more cash under Government plans to make them pay for site checks.

Following consultation on the introduction of fees for monitoring mineral and landfill permissions the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has outlined a proposal to hit quarries with the extra charges.

One north Midlands-based quarryman called the move a "slap in the face" for independent operators.

He said: "What is galling is the fact that a small quarry operator will pay exactly the same amount for policing as the giant multinational organisations working much bigger pits just down the road."

Under the new fees regime each quarry would be forced to splash out at least £1,000

a year to help meet the costs of mineral planning authorities enforcing extraction permissions. Operators will pay £259 for each quarry visit, with a minimum of four visits to each operation a year.

But quarrymen complained that, although the financial hit was bearable, the fee was another unreasonable method of wringing yet more money from a sector already reeling under the weight of the aggregates levy and landfill tax.

Peter Huxtable, secretary at independent quarry operator trade body the British Aggregates Association, said: "Again the industry is being squeezed. These monitoring fees should be covered by planning consent costs, which were increased earlier this year, and increased business rates."

Mr Huxtable said the money might not be ring-fenced and could be used to swell

local authority coffers for use elsewhere.

He said: "We will continue to make the most of a bad job. There is a danger that quarry operations are seen as a cash cow for authorities."

Mr Huxtable admitted that the number of responses to the consultation from industry had been disappointing - more than half of those that responded were planning authorities — but claimed quarriers had been left almost punch-drunk by ever increasing levels of taxation and regulation.

He said: "We are one of the most heavily regulated industries and some operators are taking the view that the Government will introduce this legislation anyway, so what is the point of responding?"

The new charges are due to be introduced on April 6 next year.

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