

Sumatera and Kalimantan Fires and Haze

Background

The annual forest fires have arrived again in many parts of Kalimantan and Sumatera Island, where over 7,000 hotspots have sprung up, producing choking smoke that has spilled over to neighboring Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Brunei. It started taking place in May and the number of hotspots increased by the beginning of July 2006. According to government officials and environmentalists, forest fires in Indonesia are mostly caused by humans (community people and companies), following slash and burn methods to clear land for plantations. Currently, the number of hotspots continues to fluctuate.

Type of Disaster

Forest Fires and Haze.

Location

The forest fires are mainly concentrated in Sumatera (Riau, Jambi and South Sumatera Provinces) and Kalimantan (Central, East and West) Islands.

Sumatera Island



Kalimantan Island



Notes: The red circles show the area where the forest and land fires are taking place.



Current Situation



According to the media, 6,800 hectares of land in Riau Province and 10,000 hectares in Jambi Province have been burnt.

In Palangkaraya, South Kalimantan Province, visibility in the city was 50 to 100 meters in the morning and only a little better in the afternoon.

The visibility in Pontianak City, West Kalimantan Province, is less than 100 meters and it disturbs city traffic. The picture to the left shows haze resulting from land and forest fires in Pontianak. NOAA Satellite detected there are 544 hot spots in West Kalimantan.

Impact

- The smoke poses health threats and disrupts air and land transportation. Choking haze from forest and ground fires covering the southern parts of Sumatra Island last Saturday, 26 August 2006, disrupted flight schedules in Jambi.
- Serious haze resulting from land and forest fires have been affecting both local populations as well as neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore. Malaysia's worst-affected region so far this year is in Sarawak where Kuching had an unhealthily high reading of 157 last week.

Problems and Needs Encountered

Constraints faced by fire fighters on the ground include difficulties in finding sources of water close to burning areas. In some remote locations, water trucks cannot easily get close to the burning areas. Lack of personnel and appropriate equipment also hampered efforts to put out the fires.

Government Action

- The Governor of Riau Province has activated a 24-hour command post to monitor the fire situation in Riau Province. Public outreach campaigns on the impact of haze to health, economy, laws, regulations and penalties on open burning, was conducted in all fire-prone areas of Riau Province.
- Riau's Health Agency has distributed masks to the public.
- The Government of South Sumatra, in cooperation with the European Union – Forest Fire South Sumatra Management Project (EU-FFSSMP), deployed fire fighting teams to suppress fires in the fire prone villages located in South Sumatra Province. As part of the community development program, with the support from the EU-FFSSMP, the Government of South Sumatra also conducted training for trainers on community rapid assessment.
- The Ministry of Forestry has deployed its fire brigade to combat the fires in burned areas.
- The Indonesian National Institute of Aeronautics and Space (LAPAN) continues to provide information on the weather situation and fire danger information. The Meteorological Service Agency of Indonesia continues to monitor on a daily basis the weather situation.
- BAKORNAS PB held a coordination meeting on 25 August 2006 to discuss further actions to prevent spreading of hotspots and fire spots. Government authorities from various ministries including Indonesian Police attended this meeting and made decisions to mobilize available fire fighters from government institutions, and trained local communities to control land fires.



- The Government has identified seven companies that will undergo investigations as they seem to be involved in starting the fires.

NGO Action

Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) has been doing an investigation on the forest fires in Kalimantan. They believe that land burning by farmers is not the main cause of the fires. Their investigation found that several oil palm plantations deliberately started fires.

WHO Action

WHO Office in Jakarta will continue to be in direct contact with pertinent stakeholders to monitor the situation.

Contact persons in Indonesia

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Source of Information

Information is gathered from the following sources and can be used for reference, but should not be used for quotation as situations change quickly at the field level.

1. WHO
2. UN system
3. BAKORNAS
4. Crisis Center (PPK), MOH
5. Indonesian Red Cross
6. Local and international news media