



COMBATING HAZE IN ASEAN: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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FACT SHEET

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How serious is the transboundary haze pollution problem in ASEAN?

Major episodes of fire and transboundary haze pollution occurred in the region during the 1980s and 1990s. The blaze of 1997-1998 which affected Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, was among the most damaging in recorded history. More than 9 million hectares of land were burnt, 6.5 million of which were forested areas. The damage was estimated at more than USD 9 billion in terms of economic, social and environmental losses, including the release of an estimated 1-2 billion tonnes of carbon. More recently, transboundary haze pollution has also become a serious problem in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Thailand. In northern Thailand, land and forest fires caused the air quality to deteriorate to unhealthy levels during the dry season of 2006 and 2007.

Why is the ASEAN region susceptible to haze pollution?

Fires in peat soils have been identified as a major contributor to transboundary haze pollution in the region. 60% of the world's tropical peatlands are found in Southeast Asia, covering an estimated area of 24 million hectares. Of this, Indonesia has about 70% of the region's peatlands.

Drainage and unsustainable management practices have made peatlands vulnerable to fire. Peat soil, which is comprised of partly-decomposed plant material, can easily burn as soon as the water is drained out and the peat dries up. Peat fires are difficult to suppress as they occur under the ground. Peat fires also produce very thick smoke haze and release a high amount of carbon.

The land and forest fires in 1997-1998, 2002 and 2005 in Southeast Asia have destroyed more than 3 million hectares of peatlands.

How is ASEAN tackling the haze issue?

Since December 1997, ASEAN Member Countries have been undertaking joint efforts in

monitoring, preventing and mitigating transboundary haze pollution resulting from land and forest fires, guided by the Regional Haze Action Plan (RHAP) that was endorsed by the ASEAN Environment Ministers.

In addition, the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (or ASEAN Haze Agreement) that was adopted in June 2002, entered into force in November 2003. Substantial progress has been made in implementing this Agreement, including the conduct of simulation exercises; implementation of the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS); use of zero-burning and controlled-burning practices; and more recently the deployment of the Panel of ASEAN Experts on Fire and Haze Assessment and Coordination.

What are the key features of the ASEAN Haze Agreement?

The ASEAN Haze Agreement recognises that transboundary haze pollution which result from land and/or forest fires should be mitigated through concerted national efforts and international cooperation.

The Agreement comprehensively addresses all aspects of fire and haze including prevention, emphasising the underlying causes, monitoring, and mitigation. An ASEAN Transboundary Haze Pollution Control Fund has been established to implement the Agreement. An ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control will also be established under the Agreement to undertake the many operational activities that arise from the Agreement. *

For more information on ASEAN cooperation on transboundary haze pollution, contact Ms. Adelina Kamal (lina@aseansec.org) of the Bureau for Resources Development at the ASEAN Secretariat.

Please visit www.aseansec.org/8914.htm for more information on ASEAN cooperation on the environment and ASEAN Haze Action Online (www.haze-online.or.id), a dedicated website on haze in ASEAN.