

ASEAN ministers agree to tackle haze issue together

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BRUNEI, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand agreed to remain vigilant and to step up their efforts to minimise transboundary haze pollution through cooperation expansion and enhancement of monitoring systems.

According to their joint statement from the 13th Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) Meeting on Transboundary Haze Pollution yesterday, these countries are looking to expand and deepen cooperation on peatland management and fire prevention with relevant parties in light of the good progress they have made in the ASEAN Peatland Forest Project and its associated Southeast Asia peat project.

These projects are in line with the implementation of the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy 2006-2020 and the National Action Plans on Peatlands in these MSC countries.

To enhance haze control management through early warning and monitoring, fire prevention and fire suppression, several training courses will also be held this year, which include: The training course on Haze and Peatland Management from May 15 to May 17 in Singapore; the Peer Learning Programme on Best Management Practices on Peatlands for Community Group from May 16 to May 18 in Thailand; and the ASEAN Training Workshop on Air Quality Monitoring and Haze Control in June 2012.

Brunei in particular, is currently expanding and improving its existing air quality monitoring network and has also opened a hotline for public query and complaints on open burning as part of its efforts to prevent and mitigate land and forest fires.

Brunei is also looking for possible areas of bilateral collaboration with Indonesia to deal with transboundary haze pollution.

Indonesia has successfully reduced the number of its haze hotspots by 20 per cent each year from the 2006 baseline, and is now in the process of ratifying its ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution.

The statement also noted the recommendation to ASEAN leaders for the development of an ASEAN-wide Fire Danger Rating Systems (FDRS) and the need to remain vigilant during the upcoming dry season between June and mid-October 2012.

It also acknowledged recommendations for the next MSC meeting to be hosted by Indonesia in Bali on September 2012.

The 13th MSC meeting yesterday involved discussions on the Transboundary Haze Pollution report, particularly the updates on fire and haze situation in all member states and the Mekong sub-region, the operationalisation progress of Indonesia's comprehensive Plan of Action in dealing with transboundary haze pollution, as well as its bilateral collaborations with Singapore and Malaysia in the Jambi and the Riau province respectively.

The meeting also discussed the progress report on cooperation projects, particularly the sustainable management and rehabilitation of peatland forests in Southeast Asia, with international partners.

The MSC meeting, which took place at The Empire Hotel & Country Club, was attended by the Minister of Development, Yang Berhormat Pehin Orang Kaya Indera Pahlawan Dato Seri Setia Hj Suyoi Hj Osman, ministers from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand and their delegates as well as representatives from the ASEAN secretariat.