

Miri on high haze alert

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RESIDENTS in the northern parts of Sarawak are expected to suffer choking haze in the coming days if there is no rain to douse the forest and peat fires in Kuala Baram.

The poor air quality in Miri has been attributed to the forest and peat fires, which saw over 600ha of land go up in smoke.

Miri Fire and Rescue Department chief Law Poh Kiong said 20 firemen and 10 personnel from the Emergency Response Team from Naim Holdings Sdn Bhd were despatched to the scene to perform a "direct attack" to stop the fire from spreading further.

"We need another 100 personnel to support our 'direct attack' operation as the area is the size of 1,500 football fields. Although a continuous downpour would be the best way to combat the fire, 'direct attack' is the most suitable method. But it takes time and requires manpower," he told the *New Straits Times*.

State Fire and Rescue Department director Khirudin Drahman Husaini said the focus will be on dousing fires at the affected areas.

"We will have to discuss with other agencies before we decide to carry out cloud seeding as it involves concerted efforts and funds. So far, we have not received any directive from the state Disaster Management Committee.

"We pray that there will be rain to ease the hazy and dry weather in the state and urge the public to avoid burning."

The haze in Miri continued to worsen with the Industrial Training Institute (ILP) station recording an Air Pollutant Index (API) reading of 396 at 6pm yesterday.

Elsewhere in Sarawak, the majority of areas had moderate API readings of between 57 and 98. The locations included Kuching, Samarahan, Sibul and Bintulu.

The department reported 250 forest and peat fires since Aug 1, including nine cases detected yesterday.

Sarawak Health director Dr Jamilah Hashim advised the people in northern Sarawak to reduce outdoor activities and stay indoors, drink at least eight glasses of water daily and wear masks if going out.

"Those who suffer from cough, asthma, red eye, chronic lung infection and fever should seek treatment if their conditions worsen," she said.

"If the residents are suffering from certain kinds of sicknesses and haze-related sicknesses, like swollen and watery eyes, sore throat and coughing, runny nose and breathing difficulty or chest pain, seek treatment immediately."