

Haze in S'wak exceeds 300 on API

District close to Kalimantan border is first area in M'sia to enter 'hazardous' level

PETALING JAYA: The haze in Sarawak is moving into the danger zone, with the Air Pollutant Index (API) in Sri Aman going beyond the 300 mark.

Located close to the Sarawak-Kalimantan border, Sri Aman is the first area in Malaysia to enter the "hazardous" level since the transboundary haze caused by slash-and-burn agricultural practices started choking the country early this month.

The API level in Sri Aman climbed up to a 395 reading as at 8pm yesterday, data from the Department of Environment showed.

A total of four spots across the nation reported "very unhealthy" levels as at 7pm yesterday, including Seri Manjung (227), Nilai in Negri Sembilan (206), Kuching (214) and Johan Setia (230).

The poor air quality in Johan Setia - an area that has been battling peatland fires due to agricultural practices for the past decade - has been aggravated due to the transboundary haze.

Up to 31 spots in the country have "unhealthy" API levels of between 105 and 193 as at 8pm yesterday.

An API reading from 0 to 50 is good while 51 to 100 is moderate, 101 to 200 is unhealthy, 201 to 300 very unhealthy, and 301 and above is deemed hazardous.

According to the National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma), a



In the danger zone: An aerial view of Kuching, Sarawak shrouded in haze with an API reading of 214. - Bernama

state of emergency will only be called if API readings exceed the 500 mark.

The last time an emergency was declared during a haze crisis was in Muar and Ledang in June 2013, with API readings surging over 700.

The haze emergency was declared to ensure public safety and health by the decision of the prime minister.

In the haze emergency declared

for Muar and Ledang, the public was still able to conduct their daily activities but had to adhere to the guidelines and advice issued by the government from time to time.

The highest API reading recorded in Malaysia was in 1997 when Kuching encountered an API reading of 860, leading to a state of emergency declared for 10 days.

Schools in Sarawak were closed, while those living in interior areas

were relatively cut off as flights were cancelled and boat travels reduced.

The haze emergency is different from that of an "emergency declaration" under the Constitution, in that it does not entail a curfew or a change to the existing system of the ruling state.

Meanwhile, as East and Central Malaysia continue to be shrouded in haze, those living in the northern

region of the country are enjoying clearer skies.

Kangar has an API level of 28 and Alor Setar recorded 43 as at 7pm yesterday.

According to the Asean Specialised Meteorological Centre, the number of hotspots in Malaysia has increased to 15 in East Malaysia and three in the peninsula on Monday, compared to no hotspots in the country the day before.

There were also 316 hotspots in Kalimantan and 154 in Sumatra recorded on Monday.

Across the causeway, Singapore's Pollutant Standards Index over the weekend has breached the "unhealthy" threshold of 100 for the first time in three years.

Singapore's National Environment Agency mobilised the Haze Task Force, comprising 28 government agencies, to minimise the impact of haze on the public.

Southern parts of Thailand are also blanketed in haze, with the Songkhla and Satun provinces recording hazardous levels of fine dust readings over the weekend.

Authorities reported that the level of PM2.5 (fine particulate matter in the air) in Hatyai, Songkhla, was 69 microgrammes per cubic metre of air, exceeding the safe threshold of 50.

In Hatyai, local authorities have distributed face masks to residents and tourists.