

KERATAN AKHBAR

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Back to back plastic waste fires

Firemen battling flames at landfill and industrial areas in Sungai Petani

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SUNGAI PETANI: Firemen in Sungai Petani are facing one of their toughest challenges yet with all the buried plastic waste burning below ground.

There are no fire hydrants in the Bedong landfill, so when the fire engines' water tanks run dry, they have to be driven a few kilometres out to be refilled.

By the time the firemen return, the water they sprayed would have evaporated in the heat, with the landfill fires smouldering once again.

"There's no river or a pond nearby. It takes about 30 minutes to top up a tank," said one fireman dousing the flames under the scorching sun yesterday.

The fire, which started at about 4pm on Monday, had grown from a 55sq m site to 12,000sq m by yesterday afternoon, a little larger than the size of a football field.

At press time yesterday, thick smoke was still billowing out of the landfill seen from kilometres away.

Small patches of burning waste could still be seen from the edges of the pile, occasionally spewing flames about 2m high.

An excavator and a bulldozer are being used to clear the waste to allow high-pressure water to be sprayed and to put out the fire deep beneath.

A contractor managing the facility said they would use soil to cover up the waste.

"The flames are under control but they are widely spread due to strong wind.

"There are tiny air pockets under the waste which promote burning, so we are covering them with soil to stop air from going in," he said.

In Penang, state exco member Phee Boon Poh said more than 10 fire engines from Voluntary Fire Squads in Seberang Prai also rushed to Kedah's aid.

"They helped all night. But it is still not enough. We have asked the exhausted volunteers to return and rest. A landfill fire fuelled by plastic waste is not easy to put out.

"Water alone is not enough. They need a lot of fresh earth to bury the burning field to snuff out the fire," Phee said.

Watch the video
[thestartv.com](https://www.thestartv.com)



With the landfill still burning, firemen had to rush over to another site some 12km away, where tonnes of scrap stashed at several factories in the Bakar Arang Light Industrial Area caught fire.

Strong wind coupled with the flammable items saw the fire spreading fast by the time the fire engines arrived at about 12.10pm. The fire was contained by 1.30pm.

At the height of the fire, thick black smoke could be seen billowing into the sky from the North-South Expressway.

Firemen used water cannons to contain the fire from spreading to Kampung Dakwah.

"We just left the Bedong dumpsite and we are now here to fight another fire, again involving waste materials.

"It's back to back and we haven't had a break. Everyone is tired," said one voluntary fireman.

A neighbouring factory owner said several reports had been lodged against the scrap processing factory in the past.

"The factory was abandoned about 10 years ago and the scrap began piling up.

"After it was full, the waste overflowed into the compounds and created a mess in the area.

"Many neighbours had complained about the matter but no action was taken," he said.

Kedah environment and climate change committee chairman Simon Ooi said residents living around the landfill were advised to stay indoors as the burning of domestic waste at the landfill might be hazardous.

"We are still waiting for feedback from the Department of Environment.

"Investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of the fire," he said.

On the factory that caught fire, Ooi said it was licensed and had moved out end of last year.

"They are licensed to store local plastic waste. Perhaps those remaining scrap are leftovers," he added.

No casualties were reported in both fires.



Darkening the sky: Thick black smoke billowing from the Bakar Arang Light Industrial Area fire in Sungai Petani. — LO TERN CHERN/The Star



Uphill task: Fire and Rescue Department officers putting out the blaze at the Bedong landfill in Sungai Petani. — ZHAFFARAN NASIB/The Star