

Riau carries out compliance audit on fire prevention

The Riau provincial administration has enlisted the help of the Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation plus (REDD+) Management Agency in carrying out a compliance audit targeting local governments and agroforestry corporations operating in the province.

According to Achmad Santosa, the deputy of law enforcement in the Presidential Working Unit for the Supervision and Management of Development (UKP4), the audit is scheduled to operate for two months starting July 1 until Aug. 30, and will be implemented jointly by various parties, including the REDD+ Management Agency, the Forestry Ministry and the Riau Police.

“One of the 13 action plans to prevent land and forest fires from spreading is an audit on companies and local governments, to ensure their responsibility in forest fire prevention in land concessions,” Achmad said in a press release made available on Tuesday.

“Many fires occur in areas previously meant as forest land concessions, easily accessed and controlled by those who have sought the legitimate occupation of the land from village chiefs or subdistrict heads,” Achmad added.

Achmad also said these areas should be mapped out by the National Land Agency (BPN) and that onsite verification was the first step in the enforcement of regulations.

Indonesia has been placed in the spotlight for its massive deforestation and forest fires that have caused haze for neighboring countries.

A recent report in the journal Nature Climate Change stated that Indonesia had lost virgin forests totaling 60,000 square kilometers (km²), an area almost as big as Ireland — during 2000-2012.

In 2012, deforestation was 8,400 km², larger than that in Brazil with 4,600 km².

A June 26 assessment by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) satellite in Indonesia revealed that hot spots in Riau had increased to 73 from 58.

In February to March, forest fire-related illnesses affected more than 53,000 people and caused estimated financial losses of Rp 10 trillion (US\$834 million) nationwide.

The agency said Riau was chosen as a pilot project due to an analysis of fires in 2013 that found that 93.2 percent of peatlands in the region — or approximately 15,419 hot spots — were prone to burning.

Further, data from the REDD+ Management Agency’s forest and land fire monitoring system found 1,643 hot spots in Riau between June 1 and July 1 this year.

According to the REDD+ Management Agency’s operations deputy, William Palitondok Sabandar, there are 18 agroforestry corporations operating around potential hot spot areas that need auditing.

“There are three aspects in consideration for the audit: the system, which ensures forest fire prevention through early detection, response and mitigation capabilities; infrastructure and human resources, which ensure the availability of facilities and adequate human resources both in quantity and quality; and the biophysical aspect, which ensures that the company does not operate on fire-prone peatlands,” William said.

Yuyun Indradi, a political campaigner for Greenpeace, welcomed the government’s initiatives for conducting the audit, but emphasized the importance of taking legal action against parties found to be in violation of existing regulations.

Yuyun said the government was too slow in enforcing its own rules against perpetrators of illegal forest clearing. (tjs)