

Air quality drops, health at risk

Residents living in a number of regions in Riau province have been reminded of the dangers of inhaling haze from forest and peat fires, which has caused air quality to drop.

In Dumai city, the quality of air on Tuesday was categorized as unhealthy and sunlight was obstructed by the haze. Based on the Pollutant Standards Index (PSI), the air quality touched 186 PSI in the morning.

“Air pollution exceeded the normal tolerable level, which is 100 PSI,” Dumai Health Office head Marjoko Santoso said.

On Monday, nearly 7 hectares of the Wisata Dumai forest conservation area was razed by fire.

“Residents should be more careful when engaged in outdoor activities and if they have to be outdoors, wear a mask,” said Marjoko.

“Besides respiratory issues, the haze and dust can also cause eye irritation. Residents must wear a mask and something to cover their heads, such as a helmet, when outdoors,” he added.

In Siak regency, the local health office has been distributing masks to motorists traveling on main roads so as to minimize the impacts of the haze. Office head Tony Candra urged residents, especially parents with toddlers, to cease outdoor activities.

Separately, Riau Disaster Mitigation Agency (BPBD) head Said Saqlul Amri said the latest satellite images showed there were 62 hot spots in Riau stood, compared to the previous count of 93. The majority were in Meranti Islands, followed by Bengkalis and Pelalawan.

“The drop is most likely momentary, as Riau is still experiencing hot weather,” he said.

Besides hot spots detected in forests and on farms, seven hot spots were spotted in oil palm plantations owned by five major private companies. In the concession areas of Industrial Forests (HTI), 16 hot spots were seen, while four others were found in production forest concessions (HPH).

“All companies have been asked to tackle the fires in their respective concessions. According to law, firefighting and anticipation is the companies’ responsibility,” said Amri.

“All plantation and forestry companies are required to have their own firefighting teams. In the event of fire, they must be prepared to extinguish the fire,” he added.