

Riau hotspots increasing

Hotspots, which had been doused by rain at one point, re-emerged in a number of regions in Riau on Wednesday as shown by satellite images, which detected 75 hotspots in the province. The figure accounted for more than half of the total of 118 hotspots monitored in Sumatra.

The hotspots were found in 10 regencies and cities in Riau, with the majority being in Rokan Hilir (34), followed by Bengkalis (19), Pelalawan (seven), Dumai and Indragiri Hilir (four each), Kampar (three) and one each in Kuantan Singingi, Rokan Hulu, Siak and Indragiri Hulu.

“Around 30 of the hotspots are believed, with a confidence level of 70 percent, to be fires. The fires are spread over four locations — 23 in Rokan Hilir, Bengkalis with five and one each in Dumai and Pelalawan,” Agus Wibowo, head of information and data affairs at the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) said in a statement on Wednesday. The number of hotspots and fires on Wednesday was higher than the previous day. On Tuesday afternoon, Riau only detected 45 hotspots and 12 fires. The fires were located in the same four locations.

“The increasing number of hotspots and fires is caused by the rise in temperature. Riau is still experiencing blistering heat,” Agus said.

He said the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency (BMKG) predicted that on Thursday, the weather in Riau would still be clear with local light showers occurring at night along the eastern, western and southern coasts of the province. The fires created a thin haze that covered the cities of Rengat and Dumai. The visibility in both cities on Wednesday dropped to 5 kilometers (km), while in other observation posts in Pekanbaru and Pelalawan, visibility amounted to 8 km.

“The Riau Haze Disaster Response Task Force is continuously making efforts to extinguish the fires by aerial and land operations,” said Agus. Separately, Riau Police told the press that they had named 67 suspects in forest and peatland arson and illegal logging cases in April.

“The number is likely to rise as law enforcers are still hunting suspects on the ground,” Riau Police spokesman Adj. Sr. Comr. Guntur Aryo Tejo said on Wednesday. He said PT National Sago Prima was the only company to have been named as a suspect for fires that occurred in the company’s sago plantation. Investigations into the case, he said, were still ongoing by the Special Crimes and Intelligence Directorate of the Riau Police.

“So far, we’ve only named the company as a suspect rather than an individual in the management. It’s no easy task to name an individual or a person in charge of a company as a suspect because investigators must obtain sufficient evidence and witness testimony,” he said. Earlier this week, Indra Purnama, the head of the information and observation division at South Sumatra BMKG’s Kenten station, said the province had lately been cloudy with light rain, Antara news agency reported in Palembang.

He said residents in the province, which is home to 8.6 million people, must be alert to the occurrence of hotspots and strong winds because they could trigger haze, which disrupts flights, daily activities and affects health. The regions most prone to hotspots, which could trigger forest and peatland fires, are Ogan Komering Ilir, Ogan Komering Ulu, Banyuasin, Musi Banyuasin, Muara Enim and Musi Rawas regencies.