

Mt. Slamet showers ash over Purwokerto

The increasing volcanic activity of Mount Slamet in Banyumas regency, Central Java caused volcanic ash to rain down on Purwokerto and its surrounding regions on Saturday, leaving a thin layer of dust on all outdoor surfaces.

Although the ash rain was thin, it was especially felt by motorists as dust on their faces.

“It hurts my eyes. My hair becomes stiff, due to the ash,” motorist Idhad of North Purwokerto district told The Jakarta Post over the weekend.

Idhad said he first thought it was just ordinary dust that covered his face, but it turned out to be volcanic ash from Mt. Slamet.

Lia of Kembaran district told the same story. She was surprised that the towels and clothes she dried under the sun outside her house were covered in dust.

“I was forced to rewash them, or otherwise they will be itchy to wear,” she said.

Mt. Slamet had been showing increasing volcanic activity for the last few days.

Ten days prior to the ash shower on Saturday, its alert status was increased by the Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation Center (PVMBG) from waspada (third level) to siaga (second level).

The same alert status of siaga was also given to the volcano two months ago, but it was later decreased to waspada before finally being put up to siaga again in less than a month.

Once it is declared to be at the top alert status of awas, all residents living within a radius of 4 to 10 kilometers from the volcano have to evacuate the area.

The head of Mt. Slamet’s observation post in Gambuhan, Pulosari Pemalang district, Banyumas, Sudrajat, confirmed that a thin shower of volcanic ash drifted southwards with the wind.

He suggested local people should put on masks if they were going outside of their homes because the ash rain was predicted to continue as Mt. Slamet’s volcanic activity also continued increasing.

The volcano was reported to have spewed volcanic dust hundreds of times and had experienced minor eruptions every day.

Separately, Banyumas regency’s Mt. Slamet eruption disaster mitigation coordinator Didi Rudwiyanto said that the ash shower had not yet influenced the daily activities of the people in the region.

“Thank God we have distributed 50,000 masks to people living around Mount Slamet,” Didi said.

He added that information about the importance of disaster preparedness had been disseminated frequently to locals.

“That’s why they did not go into a panic,” Didi said.