

## **Audit finds companies responsible for haze**

A preliminary finding by a compliance audit conducted by a government-sanctioned team has uncovered several irregularities involving local governments and agroforestry companies in Riau province that are likely to have caused rampant forest fires in the area.

The REDD+ Management Agency, the Forestry Ministry and the Riau Police jointly conducted the audit, which was executed between July 1 and Aug. 30 this year.

The audit examined 18 agroforestry firms operating around potential hotspot areas in Riau.

Bambang Hero Saharjo, the team leader who is also a professor at the Bogor Institute of Agriculture (IPB) in West Java, said that eight of the companies being audited were found to be located on peatland.

The eight companies were identified by their initials; PT JJP, PT SRL, PT DRT, PT RUJ; and PT AA, PT SSL, PT ME, PT TFDI. The first group of firms are located in Rokan Hilir regency, and the latter grouping are located in Siak regency.

The team discovered that many of the companies had submitted bogus environmental impact analysis (Amdal) in order to exploit peatland that had a depth of more than three meters.

“Presidential Decree No.32/1990 on protected areas management as well as the spatial planning law clearly states that peatland can only be exploited if the depth is less than three meters,” Bambang said on Thursday.

Another finding of the audit was that the majority of the audited firms were also embroiled in land disputes with local residents, conflicts that played a role in triggering forest fires. The team has also found evidence that the Riau provincial government and the firms have failed to perform their duty to protect the fire-prone areas.

One example of such negligence occurred in Siak regency, where the Disaster Mitigation Agency (BPBD), which is tasked with carrying out fire management efforts, lacked adequate facilities and infrastructure.

In the neighboring Rokan Hilir regency, the regional BPBD had in fact only been inaugurated earlier this year.

“Rokan Hilir regency is one of the regencies which has the most hotspot areas,” Bambang said.

The team also found that the regional government had failed to perform its role in monitoring fire-prone areas.

In June, there were 386 hotspots across Sumatra, with 221, or some 95 percent, located in Riau’s regions of Rokan Hilir.

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

Achmad Santosa, the deputy of law enforcement in the Presidential Working Unit for the Supervision and Management of Development (UKP4) said that based on the audit, the government could revoke the business licenses issued to companies responsible for the forest fires.

“But we have to wait for the complete result from the audit,” he said. (ask)