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Cabinet-haze

CABINET AGREES TO IMPLEMENT HAZE ACTION PLAN

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 20 (Bernama) -- The government will implement an action plan which entails drastic measures to tackle the lingering haze problem nation-wide, including increasing car parking fees.

The cabinet has agreed to the enforcement of those measures, depending on the prevalent air quality levels, said Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding.

The other measures are reducing public transport fares and making car-pooling mandatory, he said.

These measures would be enforced if and when air quality deteriorated to the unhealthy level of 101 and 200 as indicated by the air pollutant index.

Law told reporters this after today's weekly cabinet meeting.

Law said the plan, divided into five levels, would be implemented by the various agencies under the National Haze Committee.

He also said all quarries would be required to instal water sprinklers to reduce floating dust.

Industries dealing with volatile organic Components would be asked to reduce emission of such components, he said.

Law said should air quality worsen to the hazardous level, other measures being contemplated include closing down schools.

As for the Klang Valley area in particular, another measure would be to restrict the entry of private vehicles to the inner city zone.

Law however declined to elaborate on measures that would be taken when air quality reached the very hazardous (index reading between 201 and 300) and danger (301-500) levels.

"We'll announce and implement them when all the agencies involved have been informed of their respective functions in a week or two," he said.

Law said, overall, the haze situation in the peninsula had improved except for the Klang Valley area and Johor.

These two places experienced moderate haze today compared to slight haze yesterday.

But the situation in Sarawak, especially in the state capital Kuching, had deteriorated, recording an unhealthy level with an air pollutant index reading of 115.

The haze in Kuching, Sibul and Miri had reduced visibility there to only 1.2 km.

Law said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had also directed that cloud-seeding be carried out in areas facing drought and haze.

Law said Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat leaves for Jakarta tomorrow to discuss joint measures by Malaysia and Indonesia in overcoming the haze problem.

Mohamed is chairman of the National Disaster Relief and Management Committee.

Law said satellite pictures taken today showed less "hot spots", indicating burning forests, in Sumatera but the situation in east Kalimantan got worse.

"We know they have laws on open burning of forest but perhaps the enforcement was lax," he said.

Law said Malaysia would also propose that Indonesia take preventive and enforcement measures based on the outcome of the recent meeting of the

national haze committee.

On long-term measures, Law said these would include mandatory installation of catalytic converters in vehicles and setting up a nation-wide automatic air quality monitoring system. -- BERNAMA

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